

CHRISTIANS AND IMAGES



EARLY CHRISTIAN ATTITUDES
TOWARD IMAGES

STEVEN BIGHAM

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By Steven Bigham

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PREFACE

In 1987, an international symposium was held in Paris to commemorate the 1200th anniversary of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, Nicæa II. In the first of a series of articles presented at that symposium, Sister Charles Murray was asked to deal with an old problem: the attitude of the early Christians toward images. Even though this is an old question, it is very much alive today. Sister Murray opened her article with these words: “The subject that was suggested to me for my contribution to the symposium was the following: ‘Eliminate once and for all the idea that the Christians of the first centuries were iconophobic.’”¹ It is obvious that the theological and historical grounding of Christian art, in general, and of the icon, in particular, still arouses great interest. For all iconophiles, that is, those who accept the dogma of Nicæa II, but especially the Orthodox who claim that the icon has a sacramental and mystical character, it is naturally disquieting to hear the claim that the early Christians were aniconic and iconophobic. If this claim is true, the theology and the veneration of the icon are seriously undermined. It is, therefore, natural for iconophiles to attempt to disprove the thesis according to which the early Christians had no images whatsoever (aniconic) because they believed them to be idols (iconophobic). It is equally natural for iconophiles to want to substantiate, as much as this is possible, their deep intuition that the roots of Christian iconography go back to the apostolic age. The study in this book has the same objective as that given to Sister Murray: “Eliminate once and for all the idea that the Christians of the first centuries were iconophobic.” We do not pretend to have achieved this goal “once and for all,” but we hope to have considerably weakened the notion and credibility of the alleged hostility of the early Christians to nonidolatrous images. A more balanced evaluation of this question can thereby be established among scientific researchers.

1. Murray, Sister Charles, “Le problème de l’iconophobie et les premiers siècles chrétiens” [The Problem of the Fear of Images and the First Christian Centuries], *Nicée II: Actes du colloque international Nicée II*, F. Boesplug and N. Lossky, eds., Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 1987, p. 39.

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CHAPTER I

THE THEORY OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS' HOSTILITY TOWARD IMAGES

1.1 Aniconic and Iconophobic.

There is hardly a book on Christian art that does not have some pages, even a whole section, describing the Christian attitude toward images in the first three centuries. These Christians were supposed to be aniconic and iconophobic². The word aniconic refers to the absence of painted, drawn or sculpted images. It is a descriptive term that makes no value judgment and does not claim to explain the absence of images. By saying that the early Christians were aniconic, those who make this claim mean simply that they had, produced or ordered no images whatsoever. There is no attempt to give a reason for their “imagelessness.”

The word iconophobic, on the other hand, attempts to explain the situation described by the word aniconic. Being composed of two Greek roots meaning image and fear, iconophobic attributes to the first Christians a fear, a hostility, an aversion toward all images because the Bible, the Gospel, forbid them.

There is a theory, then, stating that the early Christians had no images and were hostile to them because their religion forbade figurative art. This theory, which we will call the hostility theory, is accepted as an established fact by nearly all researchers in the field. We cannot note all the books that have adopted this point of view, but we can mention a few that show how this idea dominates the intellectual landscape:

In general, Christian writers up to the middle of the fourth century either repudiated the use of art in the Church, or they ignored it so completely that one might suppose it did not exist³.

During the second century—exactly when is not known—the Church’s bias against representational art broke down, and some pagan myths and symbols were adopted by the Christians; a few, like the fish and the peacock, are still in use if somewhat self-consciously⁴.

We are even more interested to know the position of the apologists on the subject of the use of Christian images, but the documents are rather rare. It seems that we can characterize the attitude of the writers of the first three centuries by reticence, if not by hostility⁵.

Christian art owes very little to the Church, except perhaps tolerance. Art entered the Church and was so insignificant, so modest that it was some time before anyone noticed that it even existed and that it wanted to live, to continue to exist, and to be recognized. When Christians finally understood this ambition, it was too late to fight or discourage figurative art. Faces, symbols, allegories, and historical scenes infiltrated the Church every where, captured the Christian imagination, beat back ignorance, and took a prominent place such that it had to be tolerated⁶.

We should not be surprised to see that Christians, thinly distributed in the Roman Empire, show a conscious hostility to images. They were inheritors of the tradition of Israel and had only contempt for pagan idols which represented the gods and whose representations in Athens made the Apostle Paul burn with indignation at the sight of a whole city filled with idols⁷.

When the Christians abandoned their negative attitude to ward imagery, adopting a repertory of images and using it in such sacred places as mausoleums and cemeteries, they had serious reasons for doing so . . . among traditionally aniconic religions, Christianity was not alone in providing itself with an iconography in the first half of the third century. . . We have no reason to believe that the Manichean mission, with imagery as a propaganda instrument, provoked the Jews and Christians of the Levant, inviting them to abandon their traditional rejection of figurative art⁸.

For it must not be forgotten that they are the earliest figurations of a religion which had originally dispensed with any iconography and, failing to divine the enormous importance religious imagery was later to assume, had begun by

ruling it out entirely. It is evident that when, around the year 200, the Christians broke with this rule, they had good reasons for doing so. . .⁹

Like all ideas, the theory about the hostility of the first Christians toward images has a history, and it is possible to trace the main outlines of that history. If we set aside the arguments of the Byzantine iconoclasts of the eighth and ninth centuries, the modern history of this idea does not go back very far. Two recent studies try to follow the thread of the hostility theory back to its source.

1) Paul Finney¹⁰ sees its source in the liberal Protestant tradition, especially in the thought of Albrecht Ritschl (1822-89). Ritschl and his even more eminent disciple, Adolf von Harnack, who continued and developed his master's thought, did not actually deal directly with early Christian art; nonetheless, they laid the foundations on which other Protestant scholars were to build. For liberal Protestantism, Christianity is essentially defined in moral and ethical terms. Jesus preached an ethical religion, and his preaching gave birth to the core, essential teaching, of the young Christian community. Church history, according to this school of thought, is a series of compromises that led to the secularization and Hellenization of the Gospel message, in other words, to a progressive loss of its original purity. Liberal Protestantism considers the introduction of art into the Church as but another aspect of the Hellenization, even the paganization, of Christianity. Three other authors at the beginning of the 20th century dealt with the question of art in the primitive Church and openly adopted the hostility theory: Ernst von Dobschiitz¹¹, Hugo Koch¹² and Walter Elliger¹³. For these writers, the development of a Christian sacramentalism was an obvious sign of Christianity's wandering away from its pure and primitive core. This was all the more true since a mystical presence and force were attributed to images. It is clear that such a sacramental approach could have no place in an ethico-practical interpretation of Christian teaching which was the basis of liberal Protestantism.

2) For Sister Charles Murray¹⁴, Ernest Renan¹⁵ is the source of the hostility theory. Renan stated that since Christianity had its roots in Judaism, an obviously iconophobic religion, it also had to be iconophobic like its parent. Murray then

names Dobschütz, Koch and Elliger, as did Finney. Theodore Klauser¹⁶ took up where the others left off and developed the thesis of a purely spiritual Christianity in line with the Protestant tradition. Klauser postulated that the people, despite their Christianization, were still under pagan influence and introduced art into the Church in the face of the more conservative influence of the clergy. The iconophobia of the clergy eventually had to give way to lay pressure from beneath. Ernst Kitzinger¹⁷ based his work on that of Elliger, especially on his collection of patristic texts that supposedly “canonized” the hostility theory. Finally, three more recent researchers have reinforced the hold of the hostility theory on scholarly opinion: J. D. Breckenridge¹⁸, L. W. Barnard¹⁹ and G. B. Ladner²⁰. A very recent German work by Hans Georg Thümmel²¹ continues to promote and defend the hostility theory by the traditional method: amassing texts and interpreting them with little reference to the contribution of archeology or ancient Christian art. A French author, Pierre Prigent, has recently published a text²² inspired by Klauser’s basic theories, especially an aniconic and iconophobic ancient Christianity along with the split between a conservative clergy and a liberal laity. He presents and interprets pagan and ancient funerary art to highlight the Christian cultural heritage.

Leonid Ouspensky²³ thought that the source of the theory went back to Edward Gibbon in the eighth century, the author of *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. In his chapters on early Christianity, Gibbon described primitive Christianity as unshakably opposed to images due to its Jewish origin.

Whoever was the first author to conceive and express the theory—in fact, there may be several sources—it is certain that the modern form of the theory has progressively gained ground until, as now, it dominates nearly all scholarly studies. One point is constantly repeated in all the presentations; we can even say that it is the backbone of the hostility theory: the early Christians were aniconic and iconophobic because they were converted Jews; as such, they inherited the monolithic attitudes of traditional and normative Judaism. This Judaism supposedly rejected every kind of religious art as well as any liturgical use whatsoever of images, due to a rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment.

On the basis of this supposition, the early Christian images that have survived into our time, along with the patristic writings that describe them, bring the advocates of the hostility theory face to face with a problem: how to reconcile the apparent contradiction between their fundamental supposition, on the one hand, and the literary texts and artistic monuments, on the other. The development of the theory of early Christian hostility toward figurative art is the result of just such an effort at reconciliation. It says that, with time, Christians changed their attitude and adopted what their predecessors had categorically rejected. The evaluations of the importance of this turn-around vary with the point of view of the evaluator, so we have a whole gamut of interpretations running from the paganization of a pure and spiritual Christianity, on one end, to a necessary development that resulted from changed historical conditions, on the other. No one, however, questions the change in attitude and practice.

When the hostility theory was being developed, our knowledge of ancient Judaism was much more limited than it is today. The artistic monuments we know about today were all still underground. It is easy to see why no one questioned the notion that Judaism was monolithically iconophobic, but throughout the 20th century, our accepted ideas about the attitudes and the practices of ancient Judaism have gone through a radical revision, and this especially as a result of recent archeological discoveries. Once again, artistic monuments, this time Jewish ones, have challenged the advocates of the hostility theory to reconcile the supposed Jewish aniconia and iconophobia with the Jewish artistic monuments found in archeological digs. Even though everyone recognizes the debt that Christianity owes to Judaism, it just may be that the content of that inheritance has been misjudged. If our notions on the nature of Jewish iconophobia have to be rethought, our ideas on an early Christian iconophobia cannot escape a major reworking. It would not be the first time in human history, however, that such an intellectual reformulation was deemed necessary and that new knowledge shook the theoretical structures of what before seemed obvious to everyone. Recent studies and archeological discoveries have imposed just such a reevaluation of the received ideas about ancient Judaism and Christianity, especially about their attitudes toward figurative art.

1.2 Icon, Idol and the Hostility Theory.

Even though the modern form of the hostility theory is not very old, the content of the idea is not new to the 20th century. During the Byzantine iconoclastic crisis of the eighth and ninth centuries, the opponents of icon veneration based their opposition, at least in part, on their belief that Christianity held the middle ground between Judaism and paganism. They said that Christians rejected the bloody sacrifices of the Jews and the idolatry of the pagans.

GREGORY THE BISHOP read:

Nevertheless, we shall say what must be said in refutation of them, too:

Because the catholic Church of us Christians stands in the middle between Judaism and paganism, she shares the usual ritual of neither. Instead, she walks the new path of piety and of worship handed down by God, without acknowledging the bloody sacrifices and holocausts of Judaism; despising also the sacrifices as much as the entire practice of making and worshiping idols—of which abominable art paganism is the leader and inventor. For, having no faith in the resurrection, it [paganism] invented a plaything worthy of itself in order to present, by means of mockery, something that does not exist.²⁴

The Emperor Constantine V, who was one of the most eminent iconoclastic theologians, expressed the opinion that despite their aniconic and iconophobic beginnings, Christians had yielded to the seduction of the devil and had reintroduced idolatry into the churches in the form of icon veneration.²⁵

But, again, the aforesaid creator of evil, not wishing to see her [the Church] being comely, did not refrain from using at different times different means of wicked ingenuity in order to subdue the human race to his power; thus, with the pretext of Christianity, he reintroduced idolatry unnoticeably by convincing, with his subtleties, those who had their eyes turned to him not to relinquish the creation but rather to adore it, and pay respect to it, and consider that which is

made as God, calling it with the name “Christ.”

This interpretation of early Church history, along with other iconoclastic ideas, was expressed in the decree, *Horos*, of the iconoclastic council of Hieria (754) convoked by the Emperor Constantine V to give a conciliar and dogmatic grounding to his efforts to impose the iconoclastic reforms on the Church²⁶

During the first period of iconoclasm (726-780)²⁷, the iconoclasts claimed that an icon was an idol, and since the Christian iconophiles venerated icons—created objects—the iconoclasts called them idolaters. The iconophiles counterattacked by clearly distinguishing between an idol and an icon and, consequently, between the worship given to God alone and the veneration given to icons and other sacred objects and persons.

For, having followed men of impiety who put faith in their own minds, they have accused the holy Church, which has been joined to Christ the God, and they have made no distinction between the holy and the profane, calling the icon of the Lord and those of his saints with the same name as the wooden symbols of the idols of Satan²⁸.

To them who consider the declaration of Holy Scripture against idols as referring to the venerable icons of Christ our God and of the saints: anathema!²⁹

The strength or weakness of the modern form of the hostility theory, as well as of Byzantine iconoclasm itself, depends on whether an icon is distinguished from an idol, veneration from worship. In fact, the second foundation stone of the hostility theory, after the inheritance of iconophobia from the Jews, is a rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment:

You shall not make yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them. . . (Ex 20:45)

. . . beware lest you act corruptly by making a graven image for yourselves, in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth. And beware lest you . . . be drawn away and worship them and serve them. . . (Dt. 4:16-17)

What, in fact, is the purpose of the biblical prohibition? How are we to understand it? The iconoclastic argument and the hostility theory both claim to see an absolute rejection of figurative art by the Jews and the early Christians. It is essential, therefore, for this way of thinking to give the word image the widest possible range of meaning. If, on the other hand, it is possible to distinguish between different kinds of images, then the following questions become quite natural: What is the intention of the Second Commandment? Is it to prohibit all kinds of images or only certain categories of images?

For iconophiles, and for the position we propose to defend in this study, it is essential to distinguish clearly between an idol, that is, an image created to be worshiped as God or as a god, on the one hand, and an icon, on the other. If the iconoclasts confused two categories of figurative images and if the advocates of the hostility theory continue to evaluate the attitudes of Jews and early Christians toward figurative art by using only one category of images, then the results of their historical analyses are greatly flawed.

This is the heart of the problem: by studying the first three centuries of Christian history with a definition of the word image that does not take into account the multiple shades of meaning the word can have and then by interpreting the texts of Christian authors of that period through a prism that ignores legitimate

distinctions between an idolatrous, cultic art and a non-idolatrous, liturgical art, certain historians and theologians have misread the attitudes of Jews and early Christians. The ferocious struggle that the Christians waged against idolatry has been falsely interpreted as an absolute rejection of all figurative art. We hope to show that the hostility theory collapses of its own weight as soon as we make the most elementary distinction between an icon and an idol. If we reexamine early Christian writers in the light of this distinction and if we take into account the relevant archeology, we will see that the hostility theory is no longer tenable.

1.3 Absolute or Relative Prohibition.

We need to consider here an interesting element in the argument advanced by the iconoclasts and the modern advocates of the hostility theory. Neither for the former nor for the latter is the Second Commandment to be interpreted as an absolute ban on all figurative art. Thanks to historical documents³⁰ of the iconoclastic period, we know that those who fought against icons and their liturgical veneration were not fully aniconic in that they forbade all kinds of images. In the *Life of St. Stephen the Younger*³¹, who died around 764, a text written by the Deacon Stephen in 806, and in the history called *Theophanes Continuatus*, we read passages that show how the iconoclasts destroyed images of Christ and the saints but preserved profane ones:

In every village and town, one could witness the weeping and lamentation of the pious, whereas, on the part of the impious, [one saw] sacred things trodden upon . . . churches scraped down and smeared with ashes because they contained holy images. And wherever there were venerable images of Christ or the Mother of God or the saints, these were consigned to the flames or were gouged out or smeared over. If, on the other hand, there were pictures of trees or birds or senseless beasts and, in particular, satanic horse races, hunts, theatrical and hippodrome scenes, these were preserved with honor and given greater luster.³²

*The tyrant [Constantine V] . . . converted the church into a storehouse of fruit and an aviary: for he covered it with mosaics [representing] trees and all kinds of birds and beasts, and certain swirls of ivy leaves [enclosing] cranes, crows and peacocks, thus making the church, if I may say so, altogether unadorned.*³³

At that public spot the six holy Ecumenical Councils had been depicted by the pious emperors of olden times. . . These the new Babylonian tyrant had at that time smeared over and obliterated, and portrayed in their stead a satanic horse race and that demon-loving charioteer whom he called Ouranikos [heavenly]—so much he loved him. . .³⁴

For this reason holy pictures were taken down in all churches, while in their stead beasts and birds were set up and depicted, thus evidencing his [Theophilus'] beastly and servile mentality.³⁵

Among the Reformers of the 16th century, there were those who preached and practiced a violent and radical iconoclasm based on a rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment. There are even today some Protestants who have absolutely no liturgical art in their churches, but for most Protestants of the past and present, the Second Commandment has not been interpreted in a way that forbids all figurative art, either profane or religious. We have only to cite the stained-glass windows in Protestant churches, the portraits of the Reformers and all the other figurative art produced in Northern European countries. We can easily imagine the modern advocates of the hostility theory seated in a church in Germany or England surrounded by images of Christ, Mary and other biblical personalities without in the least being disturbed in their prayers.

It is, therefore, quite evident that for the most ferocious iconoclasts of Christian history, certain Byzantines of the eighth and ninth centuries as well as some Reformers of the 16th century, the essential question was the possibility of a liturgical art and its veneration, rather than the existence of figurative art itself. We see, then, that the distinction between an image/icon and an image/idol is accepted by everyone, even during the second period of iconoclasm (815-843), when the iconoclasts officially accepted this distinction. In the decree of the iconoclastic council of St. Sophia of Constantinople (815), the bishops confirmed the decree of the council of Hieria (754) and condemned the making and veneration of images. They stopped short, however, of calling icons idols. Despite their desire to support the Emperor Constantine V and his council, which in no uncertain terms had equated the making and veneration of icons with idolatry, the bishops in 815 refused to carry their thinking to its logical conclusion. They, thus, fell into a contradiction: they reaffirmed the position of Constantine V and his council but themselves distinguished an idol from an icon.

This council [Hieria in 754] . . . confirmed and fortified the divine doctrines of

the holy Fathers and followed . . . the six holy Ecumenical Councils. . . Furthermore she [the iconophile Empress Irene] confounded our worship (latreutiké proskynésis) by arbitrarily affirming that what is fit for God should be offered to the inanimate matter of icons. . . Wherefore, taking to heart the correct doctrine, we banish from the Catholic Church the unwarranted manufacture of the spurious icons that has been so audaciously proclaimed, impelled as we are by a judicious judgment; nay, by passing a righteous judgment upon the veneration of icons that has been injudiciously proclaimed by Tarasius, and so refuting it, we declare his assembly invalid in that it bestowed exaggerated honor to painting . . . we decree that the manufacture of icons is unfit for veneration and useless. We refrain, however, from calling them idols since there is a distinction between different kinds of evil.³⁶

This loss of rigor characterizes the second period of iconoclasm and is also apparent in the action of Emperor Leo V the Armenian (813-820). Although he was an iconoclast, the emperor, nonetheless, wanted to conclude a compromise with the patriarch St. Nicephorus (810-815). The following proposition was made to the patriarch: frescoes and mosaics, which the faithful could not venerate, would be permitted if the patriarch prohibited the veneration of icons and removed portable icons from near the floor. The patriarch refused all compromise, and the emperor inaugurated the second iconoclastic crisis³⁷. What is clearly apparent here is that the emperor did not object to the existence of icons, even in churches, but rather to their veneration.

We now come to something very strange in the argumentation of the Byzantine iconoclasts, of the moderate Reformers of the 16th century and of the modern advocates of the hostility theory: all these Christians can conceive, and put into practice, the distinction between an idolatrous figurative art (an idol) and a non-idolatrous, figurative art (an icon), but they believe that the Christians of the first three centuries, and the Jews also, were incapable of making and acting on such a distinction. Why, in reality, are those who identify themselves with the supposed aniconic and iconophobic tradition of the early Christians less aniconic and less iconophobic than those same early Christians? Even if we accept the idea that the ancient Christians were aniconic and iconophobic, the advocates of the hostility theory must admit that they themselves do not perpetuate the early

Christians' theoretical and practical purity with regards to images. If they claim that ancient Christianity and Judaism preached and practiced an absolute prohibition of figurative art based on the Second Commandment, those who admire this hypothetical rigorism and associate themselves with it are not quite up to the standards of their ancestors in the faith. They themselves are guilty of adopting practices similar to those which they condemn on the iconophile side.

This contradiction between the theory and practice of the Byzantine iconoclasts and Protestants, on the one hand, and the assumed theory and practice of the early Christians, on the other, exists only if we assume the hostility theory. If we assume, however, that the Christians of the first three centuries were as capable as nearly all other Christians of distinguishing between an idolatrous and a non-idolatrous image, then the problem disappears. By accepting this theoretical distinction, and by attributing it to the early Christians, we thereby eliminate a false problem of Church history: the existence of a radical change, an abandonment, a corruption, a paganization, etc.—the word to describe the change differs according to the theological position of the author—with regards to their attitude toward figurative art. If we set aside the notion of an ancient, radically aniconic and iconophobic Christianity, we have the possibility of conceiving Church history in terms of continuity, rather than of rupture, on the question of images. We can also take more seriously the position of the Fathers of Nicæa II who claimed that the inspiration of Christian art goes back to the Apostles.

1.4 The Argument from Tradition.

The argument from Tradition is of great importance in the debate about the early Christians' attitude toward figurative art because during the iconoclastic crisis, both the advocates of icon veneration and the iconoclasts themselves appealed to Tradition. The iconophiles claimed that they alone continued the doctrine and customs of the Apostles, while the iconoclasts claimed that they represented the lost apostolic Tradition and wanted to restore it. The question between the two groups was precisely about the content and the continuity of this Tradition. On the one hand, the iconophiles said that the Tradition had never been lost or essentially corrupted; the iconoclasts said the opposite, that is, that there had been a discontinuity, a rupture that required a purification and a restoration. For both sides, the idea of continuity of doctrine and customs was important. A basic aspect of the doctrine of Holy Tradition was at stake: the reception of a deposit and its faithful preservation and transmission from one generation to another through history.

Few defenders of the idea of Tradition claim that nothing has changed since the beginning of the Church, and everyone recognizes that all the changes that have taken place have not necessarily been for the good. We can easily see in the New Testament itself several theological tendencies, both practices and beliefs, that no longer exist or have been radically changed. A healthy doctrine of Holy Tradition makes a place for changes, and even corruption and restoration, throughout history while still affirming an essential continuity and purity. This concept is otherwise known as indefectibility: the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church. This theoretical framework, indefectibility, takes change and evolution into account but denies that there has been or can be a rupture or corruption of Holy Tradition itself.

The Reformers of the 16th century as well as the modern advocates of the hostility theory, do not share with the advocates of icon veneration a common doctrine on Holy Tradition. The Reformers generally rejected the doctrine of Holy Tradition by substituting the doctrine of sola scriptura. In their scientific approach, the hostility theoreticians are not inclined to deal with the historical question of Christian art on the basis of a supposed continuity of Holy Tradition. By their methodology, these scholars align themselves with the 16th-century

Reformers at least in that they do not work with the doctrine of Holy Tradition as a guarantor of continuity and fidelity. They try rather to show the discontinuities and the mutations throughout history. For the Protestant Reformation and the advocates of the hostility theory, the declarations of Nicæa II, as well as those of the Orthodox apologists of that time, to the effect that the production and veneration of images have their roots in the apostolic period, appear pious, naive, unscientific and unworthy of consideration. Gervais Dumeige, a Catholic, expressed himself in this way:

In studying the tradition, John [of Damascus], with more good faith than historical sensitivity, did not hesitate to push the origin of images back to Christ and to the Apostles them selves. This statement, somewhat surprising for us, is based on the belief, for John a proof, that Christ sent his own portrait to King Abgar and that the woman with an issue of blood erected a statue of Christ at Paneas (Cæsarea Philippi).³⁸

Those who contest the position of Nicæa II on the apostolic roots of Christian art agree that the hypothetical change in attitude and practice took place during the first three Christian centuries. This period is also crucial for the defenders of apostolicity. At the same time, there is no obvious and scientifically convincing theory that integrates both a doctrine of Holy Tradition and a belief in the apostolicity of Christian images: no theory that explains the change between the New Testament, which is thunderingly silent on the question of Christian images, and the post-Constantinian period in which images were received nearly everywhere.

Whether it was a transition from the silence of the New Testament to the proliferation of images after Constantine, or whether it was a corruption of the pure, primitive Gospel, the first three centuries are the pivotal period for all parties. We must, therefore, examine the authors of this period, not to see what they said about Christian images since they said almost nothing, but to see what they thought about the notion of Holy Tradition. Were these authors conscious of being in historical continuity with the Apostles? Was the idea of Holy Tradition

part of their intellectual world?

By reading the authors of the first three centuries on Tradition, as well as the numerous studies on the subject³⁹, we see that the words *paradosis* and *traditio*, along with the idea of continuity which they represent, were in fact very much present in their works. Tradition is a key concept for a good number of pre-Nicæan writers. St. Irenæus of Lyons, for example, appealed to the true apostolic traditions in his attack against the Gnostics. We can say with little fear of being contradicted that the Christians of the first three centuries were very aware of living in the wake of the Apostles; they lived in and by apostolic doctrine, practice and preaching. These Christians were proud of having received and faithfully transmitted the apostolic Tradition. We can suppose, then, that they would have been very surprised, even scandalized, at hearing that in their time they had forgotten or rejected elements of the pure and pristine Gospel—*aniconia* and *iconophobia*—by accepting and promoting figurative art.

We must not, however, be naive. In this period, there were accusations of treason, especially in the realm of Church discipline; Tertullian is a good example. But the serious accusation of the advocates of the hostility theory, namely, that the early Christians compromised themselves by accepting quasiidolatrous practices, runs squarely against the highly developed awareness among these Christians that they taught only what came from the Apostles themselves. In the context of a tenacious attachment to doctrinal and disciplinary continuity, to the preservation of the apostolic deposit, the burden of proof falls on those who explain the development of Christian art as a rejection of the primitive, iconophobic norm.

Let us now examine the claims of Nicæa II in regards to the apostolicity of images. The definition of the council makes a distinction, which has become classic, between Tradition in the singular (with a capital T) and traditions in the plural (with a small t). At this point, we are not dealing with the notion of Tradition, but rather with traditions seen as historical customs accepted by the Church during her historical pilgrim age. The Church has more or less been

aware of the development of these customs. Some were born at a certain period, in a certain region, developed through time and space, and died; for example, celebrating Easter on the same date every year regardless of the day of the week. These customs are not required or defined by the Gospel itself, but they were not forbidden either. It is possible, however, for one or more of these traditions to become the subject of controversy. It is possible for some of them to rise to the dogmatic level if the Church must defend herself against those who claim that such and such a practice is incompatible with the Gospel. As long as a custom remains uncontested, it has a certain freedom to develop, but once it becomes a bone of contention, it comes under Church scrutiny and can even require a universal judgment, for or against, if the controversy becomes a matter of doctrinal interest for the whole Church.

Figurative, Christian art is in this category of customs. It is one of the practices which the Church adopted and “baptized”⁴⁰ and which, in the eighth and ninth centuries, became the center of a bloody debate: Were Christian images and their veneration compatible or incompatible with the Gospel? As a custom, Christian art has been subject to the ups and downs of history, to the different cultures in which it has developed, to the styles and tastes of various periods, etc. In and of itself, Christian art is not necessary in the sense that it is impossible to imagine a Christianity without images; the Gospel does not explicitly require the making of images. Nonetheless, once adopted, Christian art became such an important support to the proclamation of the Gospel that its conscious rejection had very serious repercussions. With time, the Church invested so much energy in its sacred art that a simple custom became an essential witness to the preaching of the Gospel. Once again, images are not necessary, as are baptism, the Eucharist, the Trinity or the divinity of Christ, etc. without which we cannot even conceive of Christianity as we know it now. Images became essential, in time and through the blood of the martyrs, because their rejection implied a weakening or even a denial of the Incarnation itself.

It is possible to imagine—at least theoretically—a historical road other than the one the Church has actually lived through during 20 centuries: What would Christianity be like if God had chosen the Japanese instead of the Jews . . . , if Christ had come at another period. . . , if the Church had taken root in the Persian

Empire . . . , if Constantine had not become a Christian . . . , if Martin Luther had become Orthodox...? Nonetheless, the real and unimaginary history of the Church is as we know it, and inside this history Christian art was born, developed, was contested and received universal approbation. It, thus, became integrated in Christianity not just as a tradition, a custom, but as an integral part of Holy Tradition.

It is, therefore, not a contradiction to say that Christian iconography is a custom, a tradition, even an accident of history, and to believe that the open rejection of images and their veneration implies the loss of something essential to the Gospel itself. If we understand the place of “the traditions of the Church” in the Orthodox defense of icons, then it is less troubling to proclaim the dogmatic importance of a, at the beginning, humble and accessory custom.

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CHAPTER 2

THE JEWISH ATTITUDES TOWARD IMAGES

2.1 Introduction.

The preceding chapter allowed us to question the theory that the early Christians were hostile to all figurative art. It is important, however, to consider one element of that theory: the claim that the early Christians inherited the Jewish attitude toward images. What, in fact, was that attitude toward figurative art? The thesis we propose in this study is that Jews have never absolutely refused images, except obviously, idols; this discriminating attitude opens the door to a nonidolatrous, liturgical use of images. It is now our task to present the literary and archeological evidence that supports this thesis.

It is not difficult to understand how a faulty notion of ancient Judaism's attitude toward images could have been created, sustained and propagated. Those who developed this idea, as well as those who defend it today, generally came from a Protestant or modernist milieu in which iconoclastic and anti-traditional attitudes prevailed. Rabbinical literature in the first Christian centuries was relatively inaccessible, and, thus, little known to those scholars, and the archeological discoveries of our century were still unknown.

We have, therefore, in the hostility theory an example of the classical error of reading present-day conditions and attitudes back into a previous period. This same charge was made against Orthodox Christians at the time of the iconoclastic controversy when an apostolic authority was claimed for Christian figurative art. Each camp, therefore, used the same argument in order to undermine its adversary's position.

It is not our goal in this study to defend the historicity of the legends and interpretations that claim that the apostolic Christians had and used images as we know them today. There is, in fact, no positive evidence at this time that can support such claims. There are, however, several negative, theoretical arguments that undermine the credibility of an apostolic origin for Christian images. Our goal here is to remove those negative road blocks, thus, opening the road to a more serious consideration of iconophiles' basic intuition that the roots of Christian art go back to apostolic times. Having opened the theoretical space to such an affirmation, we can hope that further research and archeological

discoveries will provide historical proof for what at the moment is believed but not proved.

2.2 A Theoretical Framework.

In an article that is now more than 75 years old⁴¹, J. B. Frey tried to explain the new archeological discoveries of Jewish art in a theoretical framework other than that of a rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment, that is, an absolute refusal of any kind of image. Frey assumed an interpretation of the Second Commandment that relativizes the prohibition of images by closely linking two verses: “You shall not make for yourself a graven image. . .” and “you shall not bow down to them and serve them. . .”⁴² He interpreted history and literature in terms of an alternation between a more rigorist current and a less rigorist current:

from Solomon to the Exile, a more open attitude;

from the Exile to the first century A. D., a more rigorist attitude;

from the Second to the fifth centuries, a period of remarkable openness;

in the fifth and sixth centuries, a growing rigorism, even iconoclasm.

We can easily accept Frey’s interpretation of the Second Commandment and his thesis of two currents, one rigorist, one liberal, but it is not necessary to link these two attitudes in a historical succession, one alternating with the other. It is not certain either that Frey would have been quite so strict on the question. It is more likely that the two tendencies always co existed. Diverse historical, cultural and geographical conditions favored one or the other of the two tendencies. Neither of them, however, was able to gain a victory that allowed the elimination of the other. We would like to show that the alternation was not between those who absolutely refused images and those who were willing at all costs to develop a Jewish art; it was rather between those who wanted to restrain figurative art and those who wanted to enlarge the category of permitted, non-

idolatrous images. This latter category of images has existed in theory from the beginning and has in fact always contained concrete Jewish images.

In 1934, Frey formulated the thesis of an alternation between strict and liberal tendencies; he may even have been the first to do so, but since that time, his thesis has steadily gained ground, especially against the notion of a uniform and normative Jewish hostility toward figurative art. Carl Kraeling⁴³ also agreed that several alternating periods must be distinguished: liberal from the monarchy to the Exile; strict from the restoration to the Hellenistic period. He also identified a second period of liberal practice at the beginning of the second century. Writing about this period, M. Simon said that “images acquired the right to exist in Judaism not in the lovely period of Philonian Hellenism but rather in the time and under the auspices of the Amoraïm, the authentic successors of the Pharisees⁴⁴.” Finally, while contesting certain points of Frey’s article, J. Ouellette adopted Frey’s opinion about a lack of hostility toward images in Jewish antiquity. He wrote the following:

A methodical examination of the literary and archeological evidence has convinced a growing number of scholars that ancient Judaism, through its long history, never sustained a rigidly and uniformly hostile attitude toward figurative representations. Even if, at certain periods, we notice a definite hesitation about images, nothing allows us to conclude that there was an absence of artistic gifts or that there was a complete lack of creative imagination among those who, at all times and places, accepted the Second Commandment as an essential element of their faith in the Torah.⁴⁵

Let us suppose then that we can see an alternation in attitudes and practices—rigorist and liberal—at different eras and in different Jewish writers. How can we explain this phenomenon in a simple, clear and elegant way? An explanation is also required from those who believe that the Jewish attitude has always been constant, rigorist and negative. Is it enough to explain the phenomenon essentially, but not exclusively, in sociological, cultural and non-theological concepts, as J. Gutmann seems to do?

Each Jewish society and later Christian structure brought forth, through interpretation, a new rendering of the Second Commandment. Thus many Second Commandments have taken shape throughout history. The Commandment, although based on the original biblical injunction, means something quite different in each new historical context and must be evaluated from that standpoint. Divergent attitudes toward images, and varying interpretations of them cannot be understood in terms of a literal binding law. Rather, they need to be viewed in terms of the differing environments which produced such divergent positions.⁴⁶

We feel that we must answer “no” to our preceding question; it is not sufficient to use non-theological categories to deal with this question even though cultural factors have their role to play and must be taken into consideration if the phenomenon of Jewish art is to be explained in depth. The question of images, however, remains essentially theological since it deals with God’s revelation to his people, with his Law and with faithfulness to that revelation. We must, therefore, look for a theological explanation of a phenomenon that, within certain limits, has undergone the influence of history and necessary adaptations. We must look for the real interpretation of the divine revelation, in this case the Second Commandment, and judge human practices in its light, while at the same time realizing that the revelation must be expressed in ever changing, human history. It is important to insist that the revelation and its true interpretation precede the evaluation of human ideas and actions. In this way, we can determine whether human ideas and actions conform to the revelation. It is not history, human cultures, mentalities, etc. that determine the content of the Second Commandment. If the will of God, expressed in the Second Commandment, really imposes a rejection of all images, man’s practices can in no way change that fact. We can be faithful or unfaithful to the will of God, but we cannot change it. This is precisely the theological aspect of the question of images and why the authentic interpretation of the Second Commandment must be established so that Jewish and Christian conduct can be judged.

What then is the simple, clear and elegant interpretation that explains the

changing attitudes and practices of ancient Judaism concerning images? It is based on a reading of the Second Commandment that clearly distinguishes between an idolatrous art, obviously forbidden, and a non-idolatrous art, either symbolic, decorative or pedagogical. This latter kind of art is allowed in a context where the danger of idolatry is minimal or nonexistent. This interpretation is not artificially imposed on the biblical text from the outside, but rather derives directly from the text itself. By reading Dt 5:8-9 together as the expression of one idea, we arrive at a prohibition of idolatrous art alone. By reading the two verses separately as two commandments, we eliminate the category of non-idolatrous art. If we reread all the historical, archeological and literary evidence in the light of these two categories of art, we will see that the theory of Jewish hostility toward all figurative art is untenable.

2.3 The Application of the Hypothesis.

Let us begin with a few Old Testament events that demonstrate the distinction described above. They show how it operated in a period when, according to the theory that claims an absolute rejection of images in Israel, we ought to find very stringent practices. We can, first of all, eliminate those events that obviously associate images and idolatry: for example, 1) the golden calf that the people erected when Moses was late in coming down from the mountain (Ex. 32); 2) the statue of Nabuchodonosor (Dn 3-4); 3) the statue of Zeus that Antiochus Epiphanes set up in the Temple (1 M 1:41-64); 4) the statue of himself that Caligula wanted to put in the Temple. Other examples of idolatry could be cited, but let us study rather the examples which undermine the credibility of the rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment and which confirm the thesis of at least two kinds of images.

- The cherubim on the ark of the testimony: Ex 25:12-22. We have here images of angelic beings, even made of gold like the calf in Ex. 23, which are not in the least likely to become idols or to take God's place, because, as his throne, he sits between them. Placed so close to God himself and so intimately linked with the worship of the true God, the cherubim could never be separated from that worship and become themselves the object of misdirected, idolatrous worship. The cherubim on the Ark of the Testimony are a real problem for the advocates of rigorism, because God himself ordered Moses to have them made. The untenable contradiction in the divine commands disappears if we assume a relative interpretation of the Second Commandment that allows for non-idolatrous, liturgical images.

- The embroidered cherubim in the tabernacle: Ex 26:1, 31. God also ordered that cherubim be embroidered on ten curtains of fine linen for use in the tabernacle. It seems that there were at least ten cherubim, one for each curtain, but the text does not specify the exact number of cherubim. In addition, God ordered that a veil be placed between the Holy and the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle. This veil was also decorated with cherubim, though the text again does not state their size or number. What we said above for the sculpted cherubim on the Ark of the Testimony is equally valid for these images.

- The praise of Bezalel: Ex 31:1–11. After having ordered Moses to prepare the tabernacle and its furnishings, God designated Bezalel, son of Uri, to be the master workman, to design and to execute all the art work necessary for the tabernacle. Oholiab, son of Ahisamack, was also named along with all the other men “that they may make all that I have commanded you. . .” Among other things, these workers made the mercy seat whose two ends were decorated with the winged cherubim. The praise which God gives to Bezalel and the other artists, seeing that their task was to sculpt golden figurative images, would be contradictory and out of place in the context of an absolute prohibition against the making of all images. God’s words go beyond simple praise; their tone comes close to that of a special consecration, as in the case of a prophet:

I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver and bronze . . . and I have given to all able men ability that they may make all that I have commanded you.

We have clearly expressed in this passage, the distinction between the two kinds of images: when an artist, an image maker, sculpts non-idolatrous, liturgical images for the glory of God, he is praised and blessed by God. The natural corollary follows, however: if an artist makes idols, he will be condemned.

- The bronze serpent: Nm 21:4–9. God again orders that a “graven image” be made, an image of something “that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth,” a bronze serpent. The purpose of making the serpent was to serve as an antidote to the poisonous snakes God sent to punish the people who spoke against him and Moses. By looking at the bronze snake, those who were bitten would not die. This story shows how a sculpted image can be used in a non-idolatrous way, but according to the rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment, this image should not have been permitted. Centuries later, however, when this image—was it really the snake Moses made, or a reproduction?—became an object of idolatrous worship, King Hezekiah

destroyed it and other objects of idolatrous worship with which Israel had contaminated itself (see 2 K 18:1–4). This episode shows how an object, an image, normally not considered to be an idol, can become one. Idolatry is determined by a person's intention and attitude toward an image, and not by the image itself. Who would go so far as to say that museums that contain paintings or statues of mythical deities are pagan temples? Who would even use the word idol to talk about these images? (We will see later how the rabbis thought of ways to neutralize, that is “deidolize,” idols.) Since the Israelites offered idolatrous worship to the serpent, a thing that previously was not an idol, became one. It is interesting to note that Hezekiah did not seem at all concerned that the image of the serpent, at least the one made by Moses, existed by divine command. For Hezekiah, whatever the origin, human or divine, of an image that has become an idol, it deserves to be destroyed.

- Solomon's temple: 1 K 6:23–35 & 7:15–37. Solomon's Temple was a veritable art gallery; it is also a nightmare for the advocates of the rigorist interpretation. For the Temple's Holy of Holies, Solomon had two enormous cherubim sculpted out of wood and covered in gold. The king also had cherubim, palm trees and open flowers sculpted on all the walls of the Temple, and the door to the Holy of Holies was covered with these same images. He also put carved pomegranates on the capitals of columns. The molten sea sat on 12 bulls, and on the frames of the panels that formed the 10 stands, he put lions, bulls and cherubim.

We can use the same argument here as in the case of the cherubim in the desert tabernacle: where there is no risk of turning worship of God toward sculpted images, this figurative art can have a place in worship. On the basis of this principle, Solomon felt quite free to put such images in the Temple, and by so doing, he introduced new types of non-idolatrous images, new in comparison with the tabernacle in the desert. It is important to note that beside all the reproaches that subsequent biblical authors made against Solomon, the wise king was never criticized for having broken the Second Commandment. Flavius Josephus, however, did reproach Solomon for having introduced bulls and lions into the Temple, for him a violation of the commandment. We will examine this reproach later on and see that it is absolutely unique in all of Jewish literature.

- Solomon's Throne: 1 K 10:18–20. Solomon had lions carved on his throne, a place obviously less holy than the Temple, but nonetheless of great importance. It was the royal seat of the Lord's anointed:

The king also made a great ivory throne [which] had six steps, and at the back of the throne was a calf's head and on each side of the seat were arm rests and two lions standing beside the arm rests, while twelve lions stood there one on each end of a step on the six steps. The like of it was never made in any kingdom.

The biblical author not only did not criticize these "graven images," but he was manifestly impressed by them and quite proud of the king's glory as revealed in his throne.

- Ezekiel's vision: Ez 41:15–21. After 25 years of captivity, the Prophet Ezekiel had a vision in which he saw the Temple restored. He described the various furnishings of the Temple whose interior, the Holy, was decorated with cherubim and palm trees: "Every cherub had two faces: the face of a man toward the palm tree on the one side, and the face of a young lion toward the palm tree on the other side." It not impossible that the cherubim on the Ark of the testimony, and in Solomon's Temple, also had human faces, but the biblical text does not make this clear. Ezekiel, on the other hand, clearly introduces, at least in theory and assuming these images did not already exist, a new element into the category of permitted images: the human face. The lions and palm trees have already been noticed. The prophet did not speak of an Ark decorated with cherubim or of sculpted cherubim in the Holy of Holies, following Solomon's example. Nonetheless, since Solomon had giant cherubim sculpted for the real Temple, it is not impossible that Ezekiel would have put them in the future Temple, but in describing the Holy of Holies, Ezekiel spoke only about its measurements, nothing about its furnishings. Concerning the prophet's attitude toward images, we can deduce nothing from his silence regarding the cherubim in the Holy of Holies, the molten sea and the bronze basins held up by bulls and lions. This omission is less significant since he placed cherubim with human and lion faces

in the restored Temple.

- The real, but mitigated, praise of the engraver: Ec 38:27.

So it is with every workman and craftsman, toiling day and night; those who engrave seals, always trying to think of new designs: they set their heart on producing a good likeness, and stay up perfecting the work.

In this passage, the author praises Jewish engravers and other gifted and able craftsmen. He uses the same tone for farmers, blacksmiths and potters (38:24–39:1–11) that are necessary for every city. The skill and usefulness of these workers do not compare, however, with the wisdom of the scribe who in his leisure time “devotes his soul to reflecting on the Law of the Most High.” The author’s evaluation of these crafts in relation to the scribe—they are obviously on a lower level—is not what is important here. Our attention is drawn rather to the fact that a biblical author had no trouble praising workmen who made non-idolatrous images, even if they were only seals. The text itself does not mention what kinds of images were carved on the seals, but it says that there were always “new designs.” Nothing prevents us from supposing that the engravers carved plants, animals and human beings on their seals. The oldest existing Jewish seal dates from 922 to 746 B. C. depending on the factors chosen for its dating⁴⁷. A lion is carved on the seal. It is less surprising to allow the possibility of carved animals and humans on Jewish seals when we take into account that at a later period, that of the rabbis, even pagan gods, under certain conditions, could be carved on seals.⁴⁸

- The condemnation of artistes: Ws 13–15. The campaign against idolatry and artists who use their talent to produce idols is sometimes cited as proof of the Old Testament’s antipathy against all images and artists. In this vein, B. Cohen has written the following:

The author of the Wisdom of Solomon, who lived during the first century before the C. E., frowned upon the fruitless labor of the painter for another reason [other than idolatry]. According to him, the art of painting “leadeth fools into lust,” an evident allusion to Pygmalion, King of Cyprus, who fell in love with a statue of Venus.⁴⁹

It is quite true that the author makes some very severe statements against various kinds of artists:

No invention of perverted human skill has led us astray, no painter’s sterile labour, no figure daubed with as sorted colours, the sight of which sets fools yearning and reverencing the lifeless form of some unbreathing image. (Ws15:4-5).

It is obvious, however, that the author’s fury is directed against idols and artists who make them. Nothing is said about non-idolatrous images, nor the artists who make them.

In describing the origin of idol worship, the author of Wisdom describes the progressive transformation of images into idols, images which at the beginning were not idols. For example, he notes the father crying about his prematurely dead son. The father had a portrait made to which eventually the family gave disproportionate veneration (Ws14:5ff). Another example is the worship of kings thought to be gods. At first, their images were simply honored, but that veneration progressively turned into idolatry (Ws 14:16–20). In both cases, the real problem seems to have been not the existence of images of human beings, whether portraits or statues, but rather the transformation of honor and veneration into idolatrous worship. This is the same transformation, in a pagan context, that we saw in the biblical story of the bronze serpent which became the object of idolatrous worship. It is possible that the author of Wisdom thought that this transformation was inevitable due to the weakness of foolish men carried away by their passions and the seductive power of images. It is also

possible, however, for “intelligent men,” that is those who know and worship the true God, not to fall into the same trap as the pagans.

Most of the Old Testament passages noted in this section have always been, and still are, part of the standard answers of those who defend Christian images and their veneration against all kinds of iconoclasm based on the Second Commandment. In that sense, we have not brought forward new material. St. John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*⁵⁰ in the eighth century, as well as modern authors⁵¹, have noted them, but it is nonetheless important to bring together the biblical evidence which supports the thesis presented in this study.

2.4. The Illuminated Bible.

A certain number of scholars of ancient Christian art believe that behind the Christian tradition of biblical illumination, and behind ancient Christian art in general, there stands a similar tradition of Jewish biblical illumination. According to this theory, the Greek translation of the Bible, the Septuagint, was illuminated some 200 years before Christ. The “Jewish hypothesis,” as it is called in scholarly literature, supposes that the Jews of Alexandria adopted the pagan practice of illuminating classical texts, such as Homer and Euripides, and applied it to the Bible. Such scholars as Dimitri Ainalov and Josef Strzygowski, at the beginning of the 20th century⁵², Charles Morey, Kurt Weitzmann and C. O. Nordstrom, in the middle of the century⁵³, all proposed and defended the thesis that Christian art was inspired by a preexisting Jewish art, namely the illumination of the Septuagint. Goodenough⁵⁴ declared that Philo had an illuminated Septuagint in front of him when he commented on certain biblical texts and stories. Kretschmar⁵⁵ analyzed two paintings from the Dura-Europos synagogue and concluded, along with others, that they had their inspiration in Jewish drawing books now lost.

The Jewish hypothesis causes as many problems as it resolves. It supposes the existence of a Jewish artistic tradition which has left no trace, either in art or in literature. If we consider that the oldest Christian illumination, the Cotton Genesis in the British Museum, dates from only the fifth or sixth century A. D., it is not surprising, assuming, of course, that pre-Christian, Jewish book illuminations did exist, that none has survived. Very few illuminations from antiquity, pagan or Christian, have survived. In pagan antiquity and the Christian empire, the number of potential clients wanting such works would have been rather small. In the case of Jews, however, the number of potential buyers of illuminated Bibles would have been even smaller. The number of such luxury items must also have been very small, and when we take into account the fragility of the material on which the images may have been painted, it would, indeed, be amazing if any had come down to us. If the Jewish hypothesis is historically grounded, if there were in fact illuminated, Jewish Septuagints, one wonders, on the other hand, why there is no mention of them in Jewish literature.

What is important for our study, however, is the following: in this whole

controversy, no one has invoked the Second Commandment as a valid reason for dismissing the Jewish hypothesis. Nor have the advocates of the hypothesis⁵⁶ felt it necessary to protect their position against attacks from rigorists. The two camps simply do not consider the Second Commandment relevant to the problem. This analysis seems to be well founded: we have Hebrew Bibles and other illuminated texts (the oldest Bible dates from 895)⁵⁷ from the Middle Ages and the modern era, and this art has seemingly never been the target of censure based on the Second Commandment. Because of the lack of material evidence, direct or indirect, the Jewish hypothesis must remain simply that, a scholarly opinion. Nonetheless, since Jews during the Middle Ages, in various countries, did not feel themselves to be transgressors of the Second Commandment when they illuminated their sacred texts, it is not out of the question to suppose that Jews of antiquity could have done the same. We can even affirm that such a practice was, indeed, probable. Beyond this limit, however, we cannot go.

In the case of illuminated Jewish Bibles in antiquity, such images would certainly be religious art, but can we really speak of a liturgical art? If they existed, were they present in the synagogues? If yes, we can, indeed, speak of a kind of liturgical art, but even here we are in the realm of speculation and conjecture.

The purpose of this discussion about the Jewish hypothesis is to open up the mental space in which a preChristian, non-idolatrous Jewish art can theoretically exist. Why could not ancient Jews have done what medieval and modern ones have done, that is, distinguish in theory and in practice between an idolatrous and non-idolatrous image. In other words, the Second Commandment was not interpreted as an absolute prohibition against all images in general and all religious images in particular. In the case of illuminations, which by nature do not easily lend themselves to being worshiped, even if they were of pagan gods, the danger of idolatry is practically nonexistent. Jews, therefore, could have felt free to put figurative art to the service of their religion, however, limited that service may have been.

2.5 Between the Exile and Herod the Great.

- The return from Babylon. With the return from Exile, and during the following centuries, the Law was strictly interpreted and observed, and under the leadership of Nehemiah (445 B. C.), it became the cohesive force that kept the Jewish people together. Without a king or a national state, the Jews resisted assimilation by building their life around the Law which was solemnly accepted by all the people. After coming together to hear the Law read by the priest Ezra,

the rest of the people . . . and all who have separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the law of God, their wives, their sons, their daughters, all who have knowledge and understanding, join with their brethren, their nobles, and enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God's law . . . and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord and his ordinances and his statutes. (Ne 10:28–30)

We should not be surprised that during this period, we notice a certain rigorist tendency, an unwillingness to innovate, a reticence to enlarge, or even to make use of, the category of non-idolatrous images: “Since the return from Exile, the Jewish people turned progressively in on itself and more and more scrupulously in religious matters avoided contact with the pagan nations in whose midst it lived⁵⁸.” We should not interpret this conservatism as a refusal of the non-idolatrous image or as a repudiation of such images used in the past. We have no written evidence to indicate that the Judaism of this period identified all images with idols. There are even some indications to the contrary. We have reason to believe that the Jews, before and after the post-exilic period, understood the Second Commandment as an interdiction of idolatrous art and not as a prohibition of all figurative art; therefore, a strict observance of the Law did not seem to exclude a certain openness toward non-idolatrous images. A strict application of the Law would, however, have put a brake on the creation of new images, but we must not confuse a conservatism about one category of previously accepted images and a total refusal of this category of images.

The passion for idolatry that had captivated Israel before the Exile faded, and even disappeared, after the Exile. “The remnant of the Babylonian Exile which

returned was largely purged of idolatry, although some heathen practices lingered on even after the return but in a rapidly diminishing degree⁵⁹.” This same idea is expressed in the book of Jdt 8:18–19, written in the second century BC:

And indeed of recent times and still today, there never has been one tribe of ours, or family, or village, or town that has worshiped gods made with human hands, as once was done, and that was the reason why our ancestors were delivered over to sword and sack, and perished in misery at the hands of our enemies.

The decline of idolatry among the Jews, as well as the fear of this spiritual illness, ought to have allowed, if our hypothesis is correct, a wider use of non-idolatrous images as symbols or simple decoration, and this was in fact what happened. After the destruction of Solomon’s Temple, the danger of idolatry still remained alive in the period we are now dealing with, not so much as a force welling up from within Israel itself as a seductive power from outside, a power embodied in three phenomena: 1) the Hellenization of the ancient world, including Judæa, brought the Jews squarely face-to-face with the threat of a strongly idolatrous paganization which tended to convert and dominate every one in its zone of influence. A certain number of Jews gave in to this paganization; 2) the profanation of the Temple by Antiochus IV Epiphanes; and 3) the domination of the ancient world by the new political power, Rome, which increasingly developed the cult of the divine emperor.

Let us consider now certain cases in which we see a conservative attitude toward non-idolatrous images.

- The temple of Zerubbabel. Can the Second Temple, built between 520-515 BC, teach us anything about the attitude of the returned exiles toward non-idolatrous art, either decorative or symbolic? It is very difficult to imagine how the Second Temple was decorated. The biblical texts are unclear, but they suggest the possibility of some decoration:

1. 1 M 1:22: Antiochus pillaged the Temple and removed “the golden decoration on the front of the Temple, which he stripped of everything.”

2. 1 M 4:57: During the purification of the Temple and while carrying on the new dedication, the priests “ornamented the front of the Temple with crowns and bosses of gold . . .”

3. Ezr 5–6: In this passage, we hear about the construction of the Second Temple, but nothing is said about its decoration. The non-biblical texts⁶⁰ are not much more instructive. It is nearly certain, however, that there were no sculpted cherubim in the Holy of Holies or any reproduction of the Ark with cherubim on it. The Jewish tradition as well as several profanations during this period, perpetrated by pagans who entered the Temple by force, seem conclusive: the Holy of Holies of the Second Temple was empty.

Ought we to conclude then that the Second Temple was without decoration because of a rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment? Nothing in the subsequent literature allows us to come to such a conclusion. It is more probable that the relative simplicity of the Temple was the consequence of the limited means of the returned Exiles. From every point of view, the Temple of Zerubbabel was more modest than Solomon’s. If the builders of the Second Temple had adopted an iconoclastic attitude by refusing all figurative decoration, this would have been a tacit reproach of Solomon and Ezekiel. The biblical authors who describe the construction and the dedication of the Temple, however, give no hint of such an attitude. We conclude rather that the returned Exiles, due to their modest means, built a modest Temple which they may have decorated modestly. As for the Ark of Moses and its cherubim, the builders chose to leave the Holy of Holies empty instead of making a reproduction of a sacred object that, unfortunately, had been lost forever.

- The castle of HIRCAN. Josephus⁶¹ tells the story about a certain Hyrcanus of the very important Jewish family, the Tobiads. After having been defeated by his jealous, rival brothers, Hyrcanus retired from Jerusalem to his ancestral region in the Transjordan. He favored King Ptolemy of Egypt while his brothers fought for the Seleucid kings of Syria. In the Transjordan, Hyrcanus “also erected a strong castle, and built it entirely of white stone to the very roof, and had animals of a prodigious magnitude engraven upon it⁶².”

During an archeological expedition at Araq-el-Emir in Syria in 1904–1905⁶³, the ruins of a castle, a veritable fortress, were found, no doubt the one built by Hyrcanus, even though McCown doubts that Josephus was right in naming Hyrcanus as its builder⁶⁴ Konikoff⁶⁵ thinks the castle could have been built around 175 BC, while Frey suggests 259 BC⁶⁶. On one of the buildings found in the site, there were enormous lions sculpted in relief. What Josephus described, we can now see thanks to archeology.

Hyrcanus’s Jewish lineage, and that of the Tobiad family, is unquestioned. They were Hellenized, of course, but no one questions their being authentic Jews. If we accept that Hyrcanus did in fact build the castle, this Jew, member of an influential family, did not seem to see a violation of the Second Commandment in the animal images. And even if we doubt the historicity of Josephus’s story, it is nonetheless certain that the castle was associated with the Tobiad family. What is important here is that the Jews of this pre-Maccabean period did not protest against this sort of decoration; in any case, we have no trace of such protests if they were ever made. Josephus did not criticize them either. Not only did he not appear to be offended by the lions and other animal images, but on the contrary, he seemed to have been very impressed by the castle:

. . . and then he [Hyrcanus] made large rooms in it, some for feast ing, and some for sleeping, and living in. He also introduced a vast quantity of waters which ran along it, and which were very delightful and ornamental in the court. . . Moreover, he built courts of greater magnitude than ordinary, which he adorned with vastly large gardens⁶⁷.

Was this type of castle decoration unique in the preChristian period? After so many revolutionary archeological discoveries in the past 100 years, it would be very imprudent to give a categorically negative answer. Such a hazardous declaration, the day after its publication, would risk being contradicted by a new discovery in support of the opposite thesis. In light of what we have learned from recent discoveries, it would not be surprising one day to find other Jewish sculptures of this kind, even though at the present time we have nothing to indicate their existence. In any case, the discoveries of the last century in this area have prepared the ground, created the theoretical space, for Jewish sculptured images; they have also furnished concrete examples of images that, up to the present, were only known or hinted at in documents.

- Tombs. We read in 1 M 13:25–30 that Simon Maccabæus, a member of a zealot family very devoted to the Law, had built a family mausoleum that was ornamented with sculptures:

Simon sent and recovered the bones of his brother Jonathan, and buried him in Modein, the town of his ancestors. All Israel kept solemn mourning for him, bewailing him for many days. Over the tomb of his father and brothers Simon raised a monument high enough to catch the eye, using dressed stone back and front. He erected seven pyramids facing each other, for his father and mother and his four brothers, raising them on plinths and surrounding them with tall columns on which he had trophies of arms carved to their everlasting memory and, beside the armor, sculptured ships to be seen by all who sailed the sea. Such was the monument he constructed at Modein, and it is still there today.

Goodenough's study of the tombs and Jewish ossuaries of the Maccabæan period up to the destruction of the Second Temple shows that there were not many figurative decorations. According to his theory, the decorations that did exist were symbolic and are evidence for a strongly Hellenized, Jewish mysticism.

The decoration of the ossuaries, like that of the tombs of the period, seems to me to be elaborately symbolic, but with symbolism held in strict control. Except for a single Torah shrine, and what may have been two tentative experiments with the menorah, the designs are rigidly conventional. Rosettes are by far the most striking feature (as they are on the pediments of the tombs of the period), but the grape or cup, the “round object,” the column or colonnade, especially of four pillars with three openings, the zigzag, the lozenge, the triangular wedge, the lilaceous plant, the palm tree, the olive branch, the wreath. . .⁶⁸

The sarcophagi of the period are decorated in the same way. In speaking of decorative motifs on sarcophagi, Goodenough says, “We are still limited almost entirely to the vocabulary of wreaths, “round objects,” rosettes, vines, cups, doors, and columns⁶⁹.”

- Coins. In the Talmud, there is a passage that speaks of a tradition about ancient coins according to which they carried sculpted images:

Our Rabbis taught: What is the coin of Jerusalem? David and Solomon on the one side and Jerusalem, the Holy City, on the other side. And what is the coin of Abraham our Father? An aged man and woman on one side, and a youth and a maiden on the other side⁷⁰.

Goodenough cites other coins with figurative art on them from the Midrash: 1) the Mordecai coin showing Mordecai on one side and Esther on the other; 2) the Joshua coin showing a bull on one side and an antelope on the other; 3) the David coin showing a staff and a sack on one side and a tower on the other; 4) a second Mordecai coin with a sack and ashes on one side and a golden crown on the other⁷¹.

Goodenough doubts that these coins ever existed, but the authors of the

rabbinical texts, as well as those who transmitted the traditions, believed in their existence. These Jews mentioned such figurative coins in the Talmud and the Midrash without condemning them or reprimanding those who supposedly struck them. Sukenik, on the other hand, thinks that the rabbis had such coins, and they tried to justify them. Goodenough's study, and others, show that the Jewish coins that have come down to us through history, like the tombs and ossuaries, carry a limited number of symbols: wreaths, horns of plenty, pomegranates, anchors, palms, bunches of grapes, grape leaves, cups and amphoras. Although these images are limited to the plant kingdom, they are nonetheless images and form part of the group of non-idolatrous images accepted by Jewish authorities in the ancient period.

2.6 From Herod The Great To The Destruction Of The Temple: Josephus And Philo

Introduction. After enumerating the cases noted by the ancient authors concerning images, Frey concludes by saying that “in the first century of our era, at least in Palestine, the Jews prohibited all images of animate beings and that they based this exclusion on the texts of the Law⁷².” This conclusion has been widely accepted for a long time and continues to nourish the theory of Jewish as well as Christian aniconia and iconophobia. Those who study this question, like Frey, use Flavius Josephus and Philo of Alexandria as the main supports for their conclusions. In the 20 cases cited by Frey to show the hostility of Jews in the first century AD to all images, ten come from Josephus and three from Philo. J. Gutmann writes the following:

How is one to account for the common misunderstanding about the Jew vis-à-vis the visual arts? The misunderstanding has arisen largely because writers on the subject have quoted indiscriminately from literary sources such as the Bible, Josephus, and Philo to bolster their preconceived notions, while they have neglected to consider that these sources derive from diverse social contexts and from different epochs⁷³.

Not only Frey but also all the modern authors mention these two ancient writers in their argumentation in favor of the theory of generalized Jewish hostility toward images. The texts from Josephus and Philo must be examined, however, from two points of view: 1) the motivation that inspired them to write, especially Josephus and 2) the distinction between idolatrous and non-idolatrous images.

Flavius Josephus. Let us first of all deal with the writings of Josephus. Gutmann has this to say about the great Jewish historian:

Committed to writing history in the manner of the Greek and Roman historians, Josephus sought to render his presentations as consistent and as objective as possible. Yet, since he was determined to excuse certain of his own actions as

well as those of his fellow Jews which might give offense to his Roman patrons, he was equally committed to writing an apologia.

The predicament in which Josephus found himself—the dilemma of the factual as against the apologetic—is nowhere more obvious than in his remarks regarding art. The demands of his apologia led him to circumvent the implications of the facts he was presenting⁷⁴.

What are the ten passages from Josephus that Frey uses to show Jewish hostility toward all images? After a close examination, they do not seem to be as convincing as Frey and other authors claim.

- The golden eagle⁷⁵ Josephus tells about the incident in which Judas, son of Saripheus, and Matthias, son of Margalothus, incited their disciples to destroy a golden eagle that, as a votive offering, Herod had attached to the gate of the Temple. The religious authorities whom Herod had called together for the judgment of the troublemakers said, “what was done was done without approbation, and that it seemed to them [the principal men among the Jews] that the actors might well be punished for what they had done⁷⁶.” Did these Jewish religious authorities answer Herod just to calm his anger? No doubt they did want to calm him down, as Josephus himself notes, but did they thereby betray their own real principles? In other words, did they secretly approve of the destruction of the golden eagle but publicly, and in a cowardly fashion, support Herod in fear of their lives and positions? Did they in fact share the opinions of Judas and Matthias?

The more we learn about first-century Judaism, the more we recognize the diverse tendencies that existed among the Jews of the time. It is, therefore, risky to speak of one common Jewish position where there existed a wide range of opinions. It is not impossible, therefore, that the Jewish authorities were as sincere in their judgment as Judas and Matthias were in theirs. Such a divergence of opinion would fit in quite naturally with the general picture we have of first-

century Palestinian Judaism. Assuming the correctness of our analysis, this incident shows that two different opinions, even currents, existed among the Jews and that neither one nor the other represented the only legitimate position. We must avoid the temptation to identify the rigorist option of Judas and Matthias with scrupulous faithfulness to the Law while painting the other party with the brush of impurity and infidelity. In Christian history, Tertullian's attitude, as well as that of other writers, toward the lapsi, those Christians who sacrificed to idols during various persecutions, shows that the rigorist option has not always come out on top.

With regards to the incident of the golden eagle, we do not want to try to rehabilitate Herod; Christian as well as Jewish historians have left us a rather somber, and no doubt deserved, portrait of the king. Several of his actions, building a temple to Augustus and ordering statues of the emperor and Rome, obviously put him in a compromised position from the point of view of biblical faith. On the other hand, we should not condemn him for putting into practice a reasonable and biblical principle, that is, distinguishing between idolatrous and nonidolatrous images, just because at other times, he clearly went beyond the bounds of religious norms accepted by all.

Gutmann sees here Josephus's concern to eliminate any political and anti-Roman interpretation of the Jewish zealots' activity by explaining it as a religious protest against the violation of the Second Commandment. Josephus wanted to minimize as much as he could the possibility that the Romans might interpret the destruction of the eagle in political rather than religious terms. By placing the eagle, a Roman symbol, on the gate of the Temple, Herod himself no doubt wanted to play on the ambiguity of the symbol. In desiring to make the Temple more beautiful with a votive offering of a golden eagle, Herod hoped to cultivate the favor of the Jews and the Romans. In another era, perhaps that of Solomon or that of the rabbis of the third and fourth centuries AD, which were not marked by a growing tension between the Roman political power and the nationalist Jewish feeling, Herod's devotion might have merited praise. However, since the king deliberately played on the equivocal meaning of the eagle, he got trapped in his own game. We do not want to question the fact that Judas, Matthias and their disciples used the Second Commandment to justify their action; we do not want

to put in doubt the historicity of the event itself or to claim that Josephus falsified it in some way. We want to say rather that a rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment was used to justify an act that was as much political as religious in nature—the zealots' act was just as ambiguous as Herod's original gesture—and that this interpretation does not receive universal approval in Jewish history.

It is, therefore, probable that a group of important Jews, “the principal men of the Jews,” were able to distinguish between an idol and a non-idolatrous image and were not offended by the presence of a “graven image” on the Temple gate. Furthermore, it is more than probable that Josephus used a rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment to reduce the obvious political implications of the zealots' action.

- The emperor's image on military standards⁷⁷. Josephus tells how Pilate let Roman troops into Jerusalem at night while carrying military standards and flags with the emperor's image on them. The Jews protested vigorously against this action. Josephus says, “. . . whereas our law forbids us the very making of images; on which account the former procurators were wont to make their entry into the city with such ensigns as had not those ornaments.” The Law—the Second Commandment—is presented here in its absolutist and rigorist interpretation prohibiting all figurative art, but in examining the episode a little more closely and in the light of the distinction between two categories of images, we see that the situation is not as clear as might be thought. First of all, in this specific case, the Jews were not protesting against simple images of a human being but rather of idols. Since the Emperor Tiberius claimed to be a god, and was considered to be so by the Romans, his image was naturally the image of a god, an idol.

This story as presented by Josephus is but another example of Jewish opposition to idolatry. The question of an image of a man not claiming to be a god, a nonidolatrous image, is not being dealt with so that this episode cannot be used to prove the thesis of an absolute interdiction. The image of Tiberius was not

only an idol—that was bad enough—but it was also a symbol of Roman political power and domination over the Jewish people. We, therefore, have two reasons, the same as in the preceding incident, for the strong reaction of the Jews. We can also see Josephus's motivation for painting the incident in religious, rather than its obvious political, colors: The Roman authorities for whom Josephus wrote would be less offended by an insult to the emperor's image based on the Jews' well-known sensitivity in religious matters. In any case, Josephus's presentation of the Law—"our law forbids us the very making of images"—is simply wrong since previous and subsequent Jewish history shows that such images were made and accepted under certain conditions.

- War trophies in the Jerusalem amphitheater⁷⁸. When he constructed a theater and amphitheater in Jerusalem and proclaimed, often very cruel, games in honor of the Emperor Augustus, Herod introduced trophies of the nations that Augustus had conquered. Few things seemed more impious to the Jews than . . .

to throw men to the wild beasts, for the affording delight to the spectators, and it appeared as an instance of no less impiety, to change their own laws for such foreign exercises, but, above all the rest, the trophies gave most distaste to the Jews; for, as they imagined them to be images, included within the armor that hung around about them, they were sorely displeased at them, because it was not the custom of their country to pay honours to such images⁷⁹.

Herod finally had to remove the images from the pieces of wood to quiet the uproar.

The important question for our study is the following: Were the images on the trophies of foreign gods, even of Augustus, or were they images of men, ordinary, mortal men not claiming to be gods? Even though Frey supposed that the trophies carried the images of the Emperor Augustus, and this is not impossible, Josephus says nothing that allows us to confirm this. Josephus does say that it was not the custom of the Jews "to pay honours to such images,"

assuming that the other nations did pay them honors, did worship them. This close association invites us to conclude that the images were idols, or at least images that the Jews thought were idols. Due to the ambiguity about the images of men in Josephus's account, we cannot clearly see it as another example of Jewish reaction against idolatry, but the same ambiguity does not preclude such an interpretation.

Whatever the actual nature of the images, Josephus once again interprets in religious terms an incident with political and anti-Roman overtones—the Jews protested against games called in Augustus's honor and against the presence of trophies of nations conquered by him. We once again feel the conflict of interest between Josephus the historian and Josephus the apologist.

- The flags of Vitellius's legions⁸⁰. Vitellius had received the emperor's order to attack the king of Petra, Aretas, and he wanted to march his troops through Judæa. The Jewish leadership asked him not to go through their country, because "the laws of their country would not permit them to overlook those images which were brought into it, of which there were a great many in their ensigns." Vitellius wisely agreed to their request and, thus, avoided creating an explosive situation. Since such images, either of the emperor or of other symbols of Roman power, were considered to be idolatrous, the reaction and the request of the Jewish authorities were not surprising; they conform to the requirements of the Jewish religion. Again, Josephus brings out the religious nature of the incident to attenuate the political implications. The incident says nothing about nonidolatrous images.

- Apion's reproach. Josephus answered the attack of a pagan named Apion against the Jews. (The divisions in the text are added.)

(1) Moreover, Apion would lay a blot upon us, because we do not erect images to our emperors . . . he ought rather to have admired the magnanimity and modesty of the Romans, whereby they do not compel those that are subject to

them to transgress the laws of their countries but are willing to receive the honors due to them after such a manner as those who are to pay them esteem consistent with piety and with their own laws . . . (2a) Accordingly, since the Grecians and some other nations think it a right thing to make images, (2b) nay, when they have painted the pictures of their parents, and wives, and children, they exult for joy; and some there are who take pictures for themselves of such persons as were no way related to them: nay, some take the pictures of such servants as they were fond of. What wonder is it then if such as these appear willing to pay the same respect to their princes and lords? (3) But then our legislator had forbidden us to make images, not by way of denunciation beforehand, that the Roman authority was not to be honored, but as despising a thing that was neither necessary nor useful for either God or man. . .⁸¹

Let us examine Josephus's argumentation. First of all, he accepts Apion's criticism (1) as completely correct. The Jews do not erect statues of the emperors because they are considered gods and their statues are thereby idols. We are dealing then with idolatrous images which the Jews have always refused. But immediately after accepting Apion's reproach about erecting statues to the emperors—the Romans always saw such refusal as a sign of rebellion—Josephus tried to calm the indignation of the Romans by flattering their “magnanimity and modesty” when they accept the honors that Jews are permitted to offer. This passage certainly reveals Josephus's attitude toward the Romans. He is not even subtle in his obsequious praise of the Roman spirit.

Josephus then talks about statues (2a) and painted portraits (2b). His sentence (2a) about statues is imprecise. Is he talking about clearly idolatrous statues of the emperors, as in (1), or of statues in general, idolatrous or not? He must have known that for the Greeks and for others every sculpture was not an idol. We will see later on that other Jews, even the rabbis of the Talmudic period, were quite capable of making this distinction. In section (2b), he speaks of family portraits. Does he consider these two-dimensional works of art to be in the same category as the statues of the emperor? It seems not because, in a later chapter, he will mention three portraits of Jewish princes without calling them idolatrous. He will, on the other hand, condemn Herod for wanting to have statues of himself made.

In the third section (3), Josephus says that Moses “had forbidden us to make images. . .” How is this question dealt with in the rest of Josephus’s writings, as well as in other Jewish writings throughout his tory? This ambiguity in the text is regrettable. It seems that the disapproved practice is related to setting up statues of the emperors because Josephus wants to eliminate the interpretation that Moses, being a prophet, wanted to forbid the Jews from honoring Roman political pow are. The reference is clearly to the refusal to erect statues of the emperor, but the category of images to be forbidden extends to “images for any part of the animal creation and much less for God himself.”

It is curious, however, to hear the reason Josephus gives for Moses’s interdiction of images: they are “neither necessary nor useful for either God or man.” Idolatry is not the reason invoked; it is utility. A useless thing is not necessarily idolatrous. Josephus seems to be mixing two different categories. In any case, his reason seems imprecise and confusing. On the one hand, he talks about the idolatrous images of the Roman emperors as well as those of the Greeks, and, on the other, family portraits: he talks of idolatry and utility.

According to Josephus, every kind of image (of plants, animals, men and God) is thus prohibited, whatever might be its form or the way it was made. It goes without saying that Jewish artistic activity before Josephus as well as what followed him, and even what was being done in his own time, clearly shows that the Jews have not unanimously accepted his rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment.

- Criticism of Solomon⁸². This is a very bizarre section. There are many contradictions in it if we accept that Josephus really believed, on strictly religious grounds, in a rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment.

He describes the furnishings in the Temple⁸³ without making any distinction

between the cherubim in the Holy of Holies, on the one hand, and the lilies, the pomegranates, the flowers, the bulls and the lions which formed other aspects of the Temple's decoration, on the other. Is it not strange to read later on that he condemns only the sculpted bulls on the molten sea in the Temple and makes no mention of the other images? Solomon, he says, "sinned, and fell into an error about the observation of the laws, when he made the images of brazen oxen that supported the brazen sea. . .⁸⁴" Why were the bulls a violation of the Law while the lions were not? Even if he wanted to distinguish between the cherubim and the other animal images, Josephus condemned only the bulls, but not at the time when he described them.

Here is a second contradiction: after having described all the construction of the Temple, its furnishings and ornamentation, as well as the supposedly illegal and impure bulls, Josephus says that "Solomon made all these things for the honor of God, with great variety and magnificence, sparing no cost, but using all possible liberality in adorning the temple."⁸⁵ Further on, he states that "King Solomon had finished these works, these large and beautiful buildings . . . and all this in the interval of seven years. . . anyone who saw it would have thought it must have been an immense time ere it could have been finished . . . in so short a time. . .⁸⁶" Is this not a rather strange way to talk about a Temple that contained violations of the Law? Josephus did not doubt for a second that God had accepted and blessed the Temple: " . . . there came down a thick cloud, and stood there . . . it afforded to the minds of all a visible image and glorious appearance of God's having descended into this Temple, and of his having gladly pitched his tabernacle therein⁸⁷.

And what about Solomon's throne in the palace?

He also made himself a throne of prodigious bigness, of ivory, constructed as a seat of justice, and having six steps to it; on every one of which stood, on each end of the step, two lions, two other lions standing above also; but at the sitting place of the throne, hands came out, and received the king; and when he sat backward, he rested on half a bullock, that looked towards his back; but still all was

fastened together with gold⁸⁸. (Emphasis added)

So, we see that Josephus condemns only certain images when he denounces “the images of lions about his own throne⁸⁹” but says nothing about the young bullock which was supposedly unacceptable in the Temple. Josephus seems to have contradicted himself when in one passage he speaks of “prodigious bigness,” and in another about the same throne, he says that Solomon “sinned, and fell into an error about the observation of the laws. . .” We can only conclude that Josephus felt ill at ease in criticizing such a great king, especially in accusing him of violating the Second Commandment but that he did it anyway, illogically, awkwardly, incoherently, for another reason. What was that reason? If Josephus could show the Romans, for whom he was writing as much as for the Jews, that he could criticize such a magnificent king as Solomon on the question of images and the Law, he would strengthen his line of argument by which he tried to convince the Romans that many of the anti-Roman acts carried out by Jews in his own time were not in fact politically, but religiously, motivated.

Whatever may have been the impact of this line of argument on the Romans, the Jews of all times, by their silence, have repudiated it. Josephus is the only Jewish writer in history to have criticized Solomon on this point. Not only have Jews never interpreted Solomon’s action as a violation of the Law, but they have even embellished the biblical story about Solomon’s throne through a legend that shows a very different attitude toward images⁹⁰. According to this legend, which Blau considers very ancient, even though the written sources are certainly late, not only were lions and bulls sculpted on Solomon’s throne but also many other animals, all in gold. The numerous versions of the legend differ according to the kinds of animals, but what is surprising, however, is that there were portraits of many biblical characters. Blau comes to the following conclusion:

Now if there had been anything idolatrous in figures of animals and of human beings, their fantasy would not have ascribed such figures to the royal throne. . . If figures of animals had been something shocking to the sensibilities of the Jews of Rabbinism, they would have allowed the matter to rest with the biblical ac

count, and would not have embellished this account still further. And this was done by Jews who were so sensitive with regard to the matter of “idolatry” that they sacrificed their lives even at the suspicion thereof. The portrayal of the patriarchs as well as of the law-giver and of the high-priest would be quite particularly striking, if human figures, even per se, had been fit to be idolatrous. Rather does it follow from the legend that only such statues or plastic figures passed as being forbidden as had been made for idols, which the Talmud actually mentions?⁹¹

In the context of the remarkable silence of the biblical authors and post-biblical Jews, as well as of the legend about Solomon’s throne, Josephus’s reproach of the king’s action cannot be taken seriously as an expression of the Jewish attitude toward images in general or toward Solomon’s images in particular.

- The veils of the tabernacle. We see in Josephus’s description of the tabernacle the difficulty he had in making the biblical data fit into the framework of his politically motivated, rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment. In his description of the tabernacle, Josephus says that “the curtain was composed of purple, and scarlet, and blue, and fine linen, and embroidered with many divers sorts of figures, excepting the figures of animals.⁹²”

According to the biblical record, Moses had cherubim embroidered on these veils, but Josephus does not mention them and says that there were no animal images. It is quite probable, however, that the cherubim of the tabernacle and the Temple had at least an animal’s head, because Ezekiel gives two faces to his cherubim in his restored Temple: “Every cherub had two faces: the face of a man toward the palm tree on the one side, and the face of a young lion toward the palm tree on the other side.” (Ez. 41:18–19) It is very unlikely that the prophet invented this imagery; he no doubt simply reproduced the imagery already known from Solomon’s Temple. While it is true that cherubim are not animals, their images, nonetheless, contained an animal and a human element. The fact that Josephus does not faithfully reflect the biblical description of the cherubim and his way of playing with the word animal definitely reduce the force of his

argument.

- Herod the Tetrarch's palace in Tiberias. In his *Life*, Josephus tells how he wanted to carry out the order of the revolutionary council in Jerusalem for the destruction of the palace of Herod the Tetrarch in Tiberias. After noting that he had convoked the municipal senate and "the principal men of the city," Josephus says that he . . .

was sent to them by the people of Jerusalem as a legate, together with these other priests, in order to persuade them to demolish that house which Herod the Tetrarch had built there, and which had the figures of living creatures in it, although our laws have forbidden us to make any figures. . .⁹³

Cecil Roth⁹⁴ interprets this episode as the application of an iconoclastic law of the revolutionary council in Jerusalem in 66 giving a legal basis to the action of Judas, Matthias and their disciples who destroyed the golden eagle that Herod the Great had put on the gate of the Temple. Roth considers this ordinance to be the ultimate expression of the revolutionary and anti-Roman hysteria of the revolt as well as one of the most rigorist affirmations of the Law and Jewish traditions. Such an absolute refusal of all animal and human images was apparently an iconoclastic innovation not shared by all, because according to Josephus's own text "Capellus and the principal men belonging to the city would not give us leave, but were at length entirely overcome by us, and were induced to be of our opinion. . .⁹⁵" According to Roth, Josephus sincerely shared this iconoclastic opinion and zealously wanted to carry out the council's order. Even if Josephus did not share all the extreme positions of the revolutionaries, he accepted the new law; Roth notes the following:

Notwithstanding his subsequent apologetic attitude, he never really repudiated the Revolution of 66, which he depicts with much sympathy and in which he actively participated. He merely considered that it went too far. . . The extremists, not he, betrayed the Revolution, in his view. . . Hence in his writings

he reflects, so far as his attitude towards art is concerned, the iconoclastic attitude of the first flush of revolutionary enthusiasm. In this, he goes well beyond anything in the Rabbinic sources of the early period⁹⁶.

Gutmann is even more severe in his appreciation of Josephus's motivations and suspects him of having tried to justify his change of allegiance during the revolt:

Yet the palace of Herod Antipas in Tiberias (Lift, 12), which had figures of living creatures, he urged to have destroyed, despite the protestations of the local authorities. He counseled in this manner on the pretext that he was ordered to do so and that the figures were a violation of Jewish law. This action of Josephus was motivated no doubt to prove to the Jews of Galilee that he sided with the radical elements in Judæa and upheld their cause against Rome and its friends⁹⁷.

Gutmann attributes to Josephus an equivocal attitude toward the revolt, and his subsequent conduct does not exclude such an interpretation.

The question of Josephus's duplicity and sincerity is, and will remain, a question of discussion, but we can say, at least, that he was not consistent in the application of his iconoclasm. In describing Herod the Great's palace, Josephus did not fail to praise its beauty even though the palace too had sculpted figures, no doubt animal and human images: "There were, moreover, several groves of trees, and long walks through them, with deep canals, and cisterns, that in several parts were filled with brazen statues, through which the water ran out. . . ."⁹⁸

On one side, Josephus tried to convince his compatriots in Tiberias to destroy a palace, "which exceeds all my ability to describe . . .," because of animal images, and on the other, he lamented over the destruction of a similar palace in Jerusalem:

. . . and the very remembrance of them [the buildings of Herod the Great's palace] is a torment to one, as putting one in mind what vastly rich buildings that fire which was kindled by the robbers hath consumed; for these were not burnt by the Romans, but by these internal plotters, as we have already related, in the beginning of their rebellion⁹⁹.

- Portraits. We have previously seen that Josephus supposedly put portraits in the category of art prohibited by the Law. If Josephus faithfully represented the Jewish tradition on this point, we should conclude that Jewish portraits did not exist, and if they did, he would have denounced them. Now in three cases, Josephus writes about Jewish princes who made, or could have made, portraits of other Jews.

First of all, Jewish portraits existed. We do not know how widespread the practice was, but it most certainly existed, and without any negative commentary from Josephus. Let us examine the four following cases:

Dellius came into Judæa upon some affairs, and when he saw Aristobulus, he stood in admiration at the tallness and handsomeness of the child, and no less at Mariamne, the king's wife, and was open in his commendation of Alexandra, as the mother of most beautiful children: and when she came to discourse with him, he persuaded her to get pictures drawn of them both, and to send them to Antony for that when he saw them, he would deny her nothing that she would ask. . .¹⁰⁰

For these reasons Mariamne reproached Herod, and his sister and his mother, after a most contumelious manner . . . yet had the women great indignation at her, and raised a calumny against her that she was false to his bed: which thing they thought most likely to move Herod to anger. They also contrived to have many other circumstances believed, in order to make the thing more credible, and accused her of having sent her picture into Egypt to Antony, and that her lust

was so extravagant, as to have thus shewn herself, though she was absent, to a man that ran mad after women and to a man that had it in his power to use violence to her. . .¹⁰¹

Even though this story is not very edifying and does not put the characters in a very favorable light, Josephus makes no negative comment about the portraits. It is interesting to note that two Jewish women, Herod's mother and sister, who were outraged by another Jewish woman, Mariamne, did not try to destroy her reputation by accusing her of violating the Law, but only of lewdness, a less serious accusation than idolatry. It is difficult to believe that Herod's mother and sister would have resisted accusing Mariamne of idolatry because she had her portrait painted if they could seriously have made such an accusation. In any case, the two women obviously did not consider her portrait as an idolatrous image.

But when it was known that Agrippa was departed this life, the inhabitants of Caesarea and of Sebaste forgot the kindnesses he had bestowed on them, and acted the part of the bitter est enemies; for they cast such reproaches upon the deceased as are not fit to be spoken of: and so many of them as were then soldiers, which were a great number, went to his house and hastily carried off the statues [paintings] of this king's daughters . . . and they did such things to them as are too indecent to be related¹⁰².

Josephus's story shows the sympathy he had for this prince whom he admired for his "generosity" and "liberality."¹⁰³

Josephus does not hesitate, however, to criticize Herod for his ambition and his desire to have his own statues venerated, a veneration modeled on pagan idolatry:

Now for this my assertion about that passion of his, we have the greatest evidence, by what he did to honor Cæsar and Agrippa, and his other friends; for with what honors he paid his respects to them who were his superiors, the same did he desire to be paid to himself; and what he thought the most excellent present he could make another, he discovered an inclination to have the like presented to himself; but now the Jewish nation is by their law a stranger to all such things, and accustomed to prefer righteousness to glory; for which reason that nation was not agreeable to him, because it was out of their power to flatter the king's ambition with statues or temples, or any other such performances. . .¹⁰⁴

The evidence of Apion. This last passage from Josephus deals with the book of Apion of Alexandria who denounced Judaism. In his answer to the accusations of this pagan, Egyptian writer, Josephus quotes Hecateus of Abdere who showed a certain knowledge of the Second Temple of Jerusalem: “There is no image, nor anything, nor any donations therein; nothing at all is there planted, neither grove nor any thing of that sort¹⁰⁵.” This passage is often quoted to show that even the pagans knew about Jewish aniconia.

We see, first of all, that Hecateus speaks about the absence of an image, and from a pagan, this word used in connection with a sacred building means “the statue of a god, or even of God,” that is, an idol. Hecateus, in fact, tells us nothing new; he simply says that there was no idolatrous element in the Temple, nothing that he could even identify as idolatrous. But he also says that there were no plants. He is probably thinking in terms of grottoes and pagan temples where trees were dedicated to the gods. In reality, he describes the non-idolatrous character of the Temple bringing out the difference between it and a pagan temple. Even though Hecateus wrote during the time of the Second Temple, he does not mention the cherubim, the sculptures, the palm trees and the other decorations in Solomon's Temple. He says nothing of the decorations that presumably were visible in his time. Josephus himself tells us how in Herod's time one of the gates was decorated: “It also had golden vines above it, from which clusters of grapes hung as tall as a man's height¹⁰⁶.” Elsewhere he adds the following:

. . . the temple had doors also at the entrance and lintels over them, of the same height with the temple itself. They were adorned with embroidered veils, with their flowers of purple and pillars interwoven: and over these, but under the crown-work, was spread out a golden vine, with its branches hanging down from a great height, the largeness and fine workmanship of which was a surprising sight to the spectators. . .¹⁰⁷

These vines and flowers were, perhaps, part of the restorations of Herod the Great, but it is also possible that they were carried out before Herod's work and that they even were part of the Second Temple's decoration at the time of Hecateus. What is important here for a proper understanding of the Temple's decoration is that Hecateus gives a false impression of the Jewish attitude toward images as well as the decoration of the Temple if we understand his testimony as a statement of absolute aniconia, that is, that there was absolutely no image whatsoever of any living thing associated with the Temple during its history. Josephus, by quoting Hecateus as a witness to Jewish rigorism about images in defense of his own argument, unfortunately reinforces a false impression about the Temple's decoration.

- Flavius Josephus: Conclusion. On the basis of the examination of Josephus's testimony, it is legitimate to conclude that Josephus exaggerated the aniconia and the iconophobia of first-Century Jews by claiming 1) that the Law absolutely prohibits any image, sculpted or painted, of any living being and 2) that all Jews shared this point of view. What actually existed, however, was a diversity of opinions on the question of images. In addition, the most zealous of the groups that opposed one another on this question—Josephus may have been part of this group—exaggerated the scope of the Second Commandment for antiRoman, political reasons. Josephus's rigorist position pushed him to condemn Solomon for putting sculpted bulls in the Temple and for having carved lions put on his throne. This condemnation, however, is unique in Jewish history. Josephus's own writings show that his rigorist interpretation did not even have unanimous support among his fellow revolutionaries. Josephus deformed the biblical texts, for example those that speak of the veils of the tabernacle, to make them fit his

rigorist hypothesis, and he ignored other images that would have undermined his point of view, for example the bronze serpent. He was inconsistent in his own writings when, for example, he praised in one place what he condemned in another: the images in the palace of Herod the Tetrarch at Cæsarea, condemned, and those in Herod the Great's palace in Jerusalem, praised. Very often, Josephus's examples of generalized rigorism are simply examples of the Jewish rejection of idolatry and in no way support the rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment. The confusion between the political and religious motives of certain popular reactions, especially when symbols and images of Roman political and military power are involved, make his appeal to the Law suspect in an attempt to attenuate the force of anti-Roman feelings. Finally, Josephus's own motives make his appeals to rigorism suspect: he appealed to the Law when he wanted to exonerate his people in the eyes of the occupying Roman power by attributing to them religious instead of political motives.

We can, therefore, conclude that Josephus used a rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment to bolster many of the points he wanted to defend or condemn. Whatever he may have thought about this theological opinion—did he really believe it, or did he only use it opportunistically?—it was an opinion that was not accepted by all Jewish religious authorities, in his own time, in previous history and certainly not by the rabbis in the following centuries.

PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA. Philo of Alexandria is the other eminent Jewish author of the first century who is called as a witness to prove the thesis of Jewish aniconia and iconophobia. Though the citations from Philo are fewer in number than those from Josephus, they nonetheless deserve examination.

- The persecution of the Jews in Alexandria. Philo describes the repeated outrages that the Alexandrian Greeks inflicted on the Jews of the city for their refusal to accept statues of the emperors. He also describes the profanation of synagogues during a riot and notes how the Greeks installed images of Caligula and even a statue representing a chariot pulled by four horses in the city's largest

synagogue¹⁰⁸. Since these unfortunate incidents deal with obviously idolatrous images and their refusal by the Jews, we learn nothing about Jewish attitudes toward non-idolatrous images, decorative or symbolic.

- The statue of Caligula in the temple¹⁰⁹. The Jews of Jamnia destroyed an altar dedicated to Caligula that the Greeks, as a provocation, had built in the city. When Caligula received the report of this outrage to his honor, he decided to profane the Temple by installing his own statue in it since he had recently been declared a god. As in the previous incident, we see here only the Jewish opposition to the idolatrous cult of the emperor.

- The golden shields¹¹⁰. Philo tells the story about the Jews in Jerusalem who strongly reacted against Pilate's project to put golden shields on Herod's palace. The shields had no images on them, only the names of those to whom and by whom the shields were dedicated. Philo specifically says that the shields "carried no figure, or anything else that was forbidden, but only a necessary inscription mentioning two things: the donor's name and the reason for the gift." The Jews were nonetheless opposed to the shields. They . . .

asked [Pilate] to reconsider the subversive measure of the shields and to give up trying to modify the ancestral customs which in all the past centuries had been maintained intact as much by the kings as by the emperors. . . ¹¹¹ (Emphasis added)

Even though this project had nothing to do with the Temple, the Jews were nonetheless fiercely opposed to it. Finally, Tiberius intervened and required Pilate to remove the shields and to send them to Cæsarea.

This incident is very revealing for this whole period with regard to the symbols of Roman power in the Holy Land. The Jewish reaction is similar to the

intransigence manifested before idolatrous images, for example, the statue of Caligula; or even when the nature and the meaning of the image are ambiguous, for example, Herod's eagle on the Temple gate. In this case, the shields had no images, were attached to Herod's palace, not to the Temple, and showed only the names of the donors. It could have been that the emperor's name or a god's name was written on some of them, but even then, that would have nothing to do with the Second Commandment. The reaction was the same as though the shields had carried the images of Zeus or Caligula: the Jews refused them absolutely.

What was the source of this negative reaction? Images? There were none. Were the shields themselves objectionable as objects? It would seem not, since a similar decoration could be seen on the Temple gate, assuming it was still there; at least we read in 1 M 4:57 that the Temple was decorated with golden crowns and bosses/shields. Was it the names of the donors, the inscriptions, that caused the problem? Again, it seems not because Juster¹¹² describes the honors given by the Jewish community to worthy people, and they included insignia, golden crowns, shields, coats of arms, etc. Philo himself mentions a synagogue in Alexandria where there were shields dedicated to the emperor, no doubt with his name inscribed on them¹¹³. We must, therefore, look elsewhere than in the objects themselves for the cause of the reaction. It is to be found in the fact that the shields were part of the military equipment of the Roman army and thus symbolized Roman oppression of the Jewish people in Israel. Such symbols, at that time, in that place and under those conditions, were impossible to accept even though they were attached to the Jewish king's palace and even though the national custom that was violated was not clearly identified.

Frey himself recognized that "it is probable that, in this atmosphere of exclusivism, the political motives and the aversion toward everything that represented Roman power had as much a role to play as religious zeal¹¹⁴." We, therefore, need to be rather skeptical about protests in the name of the Second Commandment against images containing symbols of the Roman state. By invoking a religious principle, the Law, the Second Commandment, anti-Roman Jews raised the conflict from the level of politics to the higher level of religion which could justify an appeal to martyrdom. Although the religious fervor of the Jews in Palestine before 70 AD cannot be doubted, the anti-Roman political

tension tended to de form this principle in favor of greater rigorism. We have already seen, and will come back to this point later, that when the political element is not in play, before and after the first century, the strictly religious principle about images took, and would take, a quite different form.

- The condemnation of artists. After condemning idol worshipers, Philo accuses even more those . . .

who shape, each according to his desire, wood, stone, silver, gold, or other similar material and who then fill the whole earth with images, statues, and all the idols made by man's hand. Now the idol makers, sculpture, and painting have brought great harm to human life. They have destroyed the soul's firmest foundation: the proper notion of the everliving God¹¹⁵.

The fact of having accused these artists of being idolaters puts this passage with the others that condemn idolatry; it cannot, therefore, be used as evidence of Philo's attitude toward a non-idolatrous art.

- The artists banished by Moses. In one passage, however, Philo gives the clear impression of rejecting all the arts in general: Moses . . .

banished from his Republic the arts that are appreciated for their sophistication, like painting and sculpture, because they betray the nature of what is true and produce lies and sophisms which, through the eyes, seduce naive souls¹¹⁶.

Is this to be taken, like in the previous example, as another condemnation of idolatrous images, without using the word? Or is it a general condemnation of art and the affirmation of a rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment?

Two elements in the passage draw our attention: 1) the scope of the prohibition, that is, the real meaning of the Second Commandment, and 2) the real position of Philo who used Moses to support his own position. Regarding the first element, we have seen, and will see again, that an aniconic and iconophobic interpretation of the Second Commandment is not supported by Jewish practice in history. The real question for this passage then concerns the second element. Was Philo a rigorist? If yes, was he representative of Judaism at the time? The problem can easily be resolved if we interpret the text in line with the one noted in the previous section and if we say that Philo, although he does not use the word idolatrous, wanted to refer to idolatry. If, however, we must read this text as it is, it seems that a Jew like Philo, supposedly a rigorist on this question, did not invoke idolatry as a reason to condemn painting and sculpture. These arts “betray the nature of what is true and produce lies and sophisms which, through the eyes, seduce naive souls.” What true things, what lies, what sophisms, what seduction, and what kind of naive souls is he talking about?

All these words, especially from a Jew or a Christian, are they not intellectual weapons against idolatrous images? He was certainly talking about visible objects, “through the eyes.” Idolatry is opposed to the nature of what is true: one single invisible God; the lies of idolatry are opposed to the truth of biblical monotheism; the sophisms and the seduction of those “nothings,” the false gods, that supposedly inhabit the statues are opposed to the truth of the one God who inhabits the heavens; and the naive souls of the pagans are opposed to those of Jews and Christians who know the truth about the multitude of pagan gods. Even though this passage closely follows one in Plato’s Republic—and it is quite possible that Philo was inspired here by Plato—the tone and vocabulary are quite in line with the classical attack of Jews and Christians against idolatry. It is, therefore, preferable to read this passage in the light of the previously cited text (see above The Condemnation of Artists), and to interpret his words to mean that Moses banished the arts that led to the error of all errors, idolatry. If Philo really believed that Moses banished any and all artists, how would he explain that Bezalel, Oholiab and the other workers seemed to escape Moses’s banishment order? In fact, the Scriptures make no mention of such a banishment. The question of an art that reflects the truth about God, which does not seduce, that does not form lies, etc., in other words, an art that is used in the service of the

true God, is not at all dealt with here.

- Other evidence. In his work on Hellenistic Judaism¹¹⁷, Goodenough claims that the Jews in the Diaspora modeled their religion on Greek mysticism and wonders about the possibility of a non-idolatrous, Jewish iconography developed in the desire to imitate Greek culture as much as possible. He takes Philo as the intellectual archetype of this mystical Judaism and wants to study the question of Philo's attitude toward art. Goodenough agrees that certain passages, like the one we have already noted, could lead to a negative evaluation of his attitude, but other passages manifest a positive attitude toward the beauty of art. He concludes by saying that. . .

an iconography of the Jewish Patriarchs and their Mystery, in which God was symbolically represented by a hand, would not violate Philo's position in the least. . . True Philo does not mention such a Jewish iconography. But it is highly noteworthy that he does leave room for such an iconography, and shows a sympathy for works of art. . .¹¹⁸

Wolfson comes to about the same conclusion in his study on Philo who, says Wolfson, although he rejected all idolatrous images, did not include all figurative art in that category. According to Wolfson, Philo only condemned three-dimensional images, such as manycolored statues. He never interpreted the Law in a rigorist way and never rejected images of two dimensions. Wolfson:

This interpretation of the law was quite evidently that which was followed both by the author of the Wisdom of Solomon and by Philo, as well as later by the Jews in Dura-Europos, as may be judged from the paintings in their synagogue¹¹⁹.

- Philo: conclusion. It is hard to understand how anyone can use Philo to support

a rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment. In the two cases we have noted, the refusal of images is simply a refusal of idolatry. In his condemnation of artists, Philo based his negative judgment on the danger of idolatry. The incident of the shields does not even touch on the question of images, except obliquely in that it shows just how far anti-Roman fever had progressed in Palestine and how the zealots could use “national customs” to justify their actions. Only the text about Moses is open to a rigorist interpretation, but it can also be understood, according to Wolfson, to be a condemnation of painted statues. A non-rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment, condemning only idolatrous arts, fits better into Philo’s global vision as we know it from all his writings than a rigorist condemnation of all figurative art.

Gutmann is right then in writing that the false understanding of the Jewish attitude toward figurative art can be attributed to writers who “have quoted indiscriminately from literary sources such as the Bible, Josephus, and Philo, to bolster their preconceived notions. . .¹²⁰ It is, therefore, apparent that Josephus and Philo cannot be used as witness for a supposed Jewish hostility toward all images in the first century AD. A reevaluation of this false conclusion is needed. As for Judaism’s attitude toward images in general, it just may be that its attitude during this period is not at all like the picture that advocates of the hostility theory have painted.

2.7 After the Destruction of the Temple: Rabbinical Judaism.

We now enter a period of the greatest importance for the question we are studying, from the Jewish as well as from the Christian point of view. According to the hostility theory, it was during the first centuries AD that the Christians rejected Jewish aniconia and iconophobia and developed nearly idolatrous, artistic practices. A corollary to this position, though rarely stated, is that the Jews continued to be faithful to a rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment. Without any archeological proof to the contrary, until the 20th century, the hostility theory and its corollary were easily defended.

We now know, however, due to recent archeological discoveries, that in the centuries following the destruction of Jerusalem, the Jews of the Diaspora, and even in Palestine, greatly enlarged the category of non-idolatrous images admitted in holy places such as synagogues and cemeteries. The discovery of just such Jewish artistic monuments has overturned many received ideas and has necessitated a rethinking of the whole question. The crisis that the archeological finds have provoked has been felt even in theology, in the sense that they have obliged us to reconsider the way we have come to think about the will of God and images. These monuments are obviously interesting for the study of architecture, culture, society, history, etc., but since the Second Commandment is part of God's revelation to his people, it is also at the base of the Jewish and Christian attitudes toward images. What is at stake here is faithfulness or unfaithfulness to God and his Law, that is, orthodoxy or heterodoxy. The religious sciences, like all human sciences, must distance themselves from the objects of their research. The problems of fidelity or infidelity have no meaning for this kind of religious research, but a theological question always implies an inquiry in relation to a given faith, a revelation. It supposes that we can and want to know God's will, that we can and want to put it into practice. Now, the will of God, as a category of research, goes beyond the competence of religious sciences, those that are based on what is called the scientific method.

We see the importance, then, for both Christianity and Judaism, of the renewal of discussion about images and the Second Commandment. This is why Konikoff entitled the last two chapters of his study on this period "The Conclusive Period" and "The Authoritative Interpretation of the Second Commandment¹²¹." If a

rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment is accepted as normative and orthodox, an attitude that requires aniconia in practice and iconophobia in theory, then it follows that a Jewish figurative art with plants, animals, men and even pagan gods would constitute an infidelity to the will of God. In the light of the Jewish monuments already discovered and the rabbinical texts newly studied and reevaluated, it is difficult to maintain a rigorist interpretation without condemning a significant portion, if not nearly all, of Judaism during this period.

We cannot mention all the synagogues, all the Jewish catacombs that contain images of all sorts. Numerous studies already exist on the subject¹²². A study of these monuments leads to the following indisputable conclusion: during the first Christian centuries, the Jews progressively evolved from a very restricted symbolic art (etrogs, menorahs, lulavs, palm trees, shofars, etc.) toward a very elaborate figurative art, as at DuraEuropos, for example, without feeling that they were betraying their Jewish faith. What interests us here is the theological interpretation of this art and its implication for Christianity.

Another interesting element comes out of the studies of these discovered monuments: it seems increasingly clear that Judaism led the way in developing figurative art and that Christianity followed, at least at the beginning. We have already seen that this hypothesis is upheld by many scholars¹²³. Even in areas other than art, we see the same phenomenon: early Christianity often modeled itself on its Jewish parent. "For the ancestry of most elements of early church worship, we must look to the synagogue rather than the home. . .¹²⁴" In this study, Filson compares the Temple, the house church and the synagogue as possible sources for the Christian liturgy. The general impression of Christian dependence on Judaism is strongly reinforced in the realm of art by the discoveries at Dura-Europos. Right near a synagogue, a building specifically conceived and built as a center of worship and entirely decorated on the inside with paintings of biblical stories, there was a house church. In this Christian building, there was a large hall, with no paintings, that could accommodate a large number of people for the Eucharist as well as a smaller room, a baptistry, modestly decorated with images. The respective situations of the two religions are clearly set out by these two buildings: Judaism was a legal, rich and ancient religion having many adherents; Christianity, on the other hand, was an illegal,

poor and new religion having few adherents.

Even though the Christians considered themselves superior to the Jews because the parent religion had rejected the one the Christians considered to be the Messiah, from all other points of view, the Jews were in a superior position vis-à-vis the Christians. It is difficult to imagine that in the pre-Constantinian period the Jews would have tried to imitate elements of the Christian liturgy. After all, it was the Jews who had expelled the Christians from the synagogues, condemned them by a special prayer and considered them to be detestable heretics. It is quite probable, therefore, that Christians imitated Jewish practices, already more advanced than their own, in developing a Christian art. This is also Konikoff's conclusion about mosaics:

Taking the Palestinian mosaics of the period as a whole, it appears that the synagogue pointed the way to the introduction of articulate subject matter. Jewish pavement iconography came first and developed faster than its Christian counterpart; on the other hand, the pictorial decoration of synagogue pavements came to an end before that of church pavements¹²⁵.

If this conclusion is correct, it delivers another blow to the hostility theory according to which the Jews ought to have been more conservative and the Christians more liberal, but, great surprise, the opposite was the case. On the basis of their supposed rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment, the Jews should have remained aniconic and iconophobic, but they showed themselves to be neither. For a long time, the fear of idolatry among the Jews themselves had largely diminished, to such a point that their leaders, the Tannaïm and the Amoraïm, could increasingly adopt new non-idolatrous images without any danger. Simon's conclusion has become classic:

It is interesting to note that images acquired the right to exist in Judaism, not in the lovely period of Philonian Hellenism, but rather in the time and under the auspices of those Amoraïm, the authentic successors of the Pharisees. The

phenomenon is easily explained: Judaism had been “immunized” by several generations of Pharisee discipline and could therefore allow some stretching of the rigidity of old principles.

Unfortunately, Simon continues to believe that these developments were carried out against “the rigidity of old principles.” Instead of saying that these developments simply enlarged the category of accepted images, which had existed since Moses, Simon gives the impression that they went against the Law.

As long as Judaism’s only worthy opponent was grossly idolatrous paganism, it felt freer to enlarge its category of non-idolatrous images and to produce an essentially narrative, figurative art¹²⁷. But a Jewish iconoclastic reaction developed in the sixth and seventh centuries when Christianity, armed with a figurative art that carried a mystical presence, the icon, replaced paganism as Judaism’s principle rival. We see the results of this reaction in certain Jewish monuments brought to light by archeologists¹²⁸. Not having the theological base, the Incarnation, that could support a sacramental art, Judaism identified Christian art with idolatry and sought to distinguish itself from Christianity in art by reducing the category of images allowed in the synagogues¹²⁹. Jewish art in the synagogues thus found its own level in the following possibilities: 1) narrative, decorative and pedagogical images that illustrate biblical stories and that make the synagogue more beautiful, 2) simple symbols, 3) a complete absence of images. An art that was both a carrier of a sacramental mystery and non-idolatrous, that is the icon, had no place, no theological foundation, in rabbinical Judaism. However, just as certain zealot groups in first-century Palestine could not universally impose their point of view, Jewish iconoclasts of the sixth and seventh centuries could not reduce Judaism to an aniconia like that found in Islam. They were able to reduce the number and extent of nonidolatrous images accepted in the synagogues, but not to banish them entirely.

Although it is useful to set out a catalog of Jewish art, this is not necessary here. Others have already accomplished the task, and the reader can consult these works¹³⁰. We would only like to call attention to some elements, in this period

(70–330 AD) and up to the Middle Ages, which give credence to the position defended in this study, namely that the Jews never adopted as normative a rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment and that they have manifested a more or less open attitude toward non-idolatrous images, depending on the historical period.

For example, Kaufmann defends the idea that lions, even sculpted ones, have always been accepted in synagogues¹³¹. The debate on this subject that took place in Italy in the 16th century shows that all Jewish authorities of that time did not share the same opinion. Kaufmann's conclusion, on the other hand, is based on the pieces of sculpted lions found in the ruins of certain ancient synagogues in Palestine¹³² and on a glass with a golden base found in a catacomb in Rome on which two lions are seen protecting the Torah tabernacle in a synagogue¹³³.

It is important to note that the two tendencies coexisted in the writings of rabbinical authorities who succeeded those in Jerusalem after the destruction of the city in 70 AD, namely the Tannaïm (10–220 AD) and the Amoraïm (220–500 AD): one tendency toward a rigorist interpretation and the other toward a more liberal one. Two texts of the second tendency have now become classical. 1) (third century) “In the time of R. Yohanan, the people began to have paintings on the walls, and the rabbis did not prohibit them¹³⁴.” and 2) (fourth century) “In the days of R. Abun, they began to make designs on mosaics, and he did not prevent them¹³⁵.” The synagogue of Dura-Europos and those discovered in Palestine confirm this literary evidence.

As for the rigorist tendency, we have the following testimony: the Babylonian Talmud (Berachoth 30b) tells that “although there were thirteen synagogues in Tiberias, R. Ammi and R. Assi prayed only between the pillars¹³⁶. We can suppose that in this place, between the columns, the rabbis were not forced to prostrate themselves on the mosaic floors that had images in them. According to Lv 26:1, “. . . you shall not set up a figured stone in your land, to bow down to them; for I am the Lord your God.” The rabbis must have felt themselves too

close to idolatry, yet they did not condemn such images.

Even for those rabbis that opposed images, they did not always base their opposition on the Second Commandment. Some thought that the money spent to beautify the synagogues, with wall-paintings and mosaics no doubt, would better serve to help students of the Talmud¹³⁷.” At a much later period, Maimonides (1135–1204) and other rabbis expressed an other attitude. Maimonides closed his eyes when he was in a synagogue that had wall-paintings, because the pictures disturbed his prayers¹³⁸. Rabbi Meir de Rothenburg was also against illuminated prayer books, because the images were a possible distraction and not, as he himself said, because they violated the Law¹³⁹. It is not unreasonable to assume that similar sentiments existed in earlier periods.

Indeed, curtains embroidered with figures are in use in almost every country where the Jews are scattered, without any fear of disturbing the thought of worshipers in the synagogue, for the reason that artistic decoration in honor of the Torah is regarded as appropriate and the worshiper, if disturbed by it, needs not observe the figures, as he can shut his eyes during prayer (“Abkat Rokel,” Responsa, #66)¹⁴⁰.

In analyzing the rabbinical judgments of the Talmudic period about images in general, we see that the principle preoccupation was to protect the faithful against idolatry. There is nothing surprising in that, but as concerned as they were to reject idolatrous images, the rabbis did not banish all images. They did not put all images in the same category, and their judgments show that they could put into practice the theoretical distinction between at least two categories of images. The examination of these judgments demonstrates that the rigorist position advocated by Josephus and by the defenders of the hostility theory is not confirmed.

The case of the Nehardea synagogue in Babylon is very significant. According to the Jerusalem Talmud, the rabbis distinguished between royal statues that

were forbidden, and those of local authorities that were permitted. What was their reasoning? Statues of kings and emperors were considered to be idols while the others were simply decorative¹⁴¹. Even if this particular judgment is principally aimed at Jewish business men, the same distinction is at the base of Rabbis Rab and Samuel's reaction (first half of the third century AD): two authorities who did not object to the presence of a statue of the Persian king in the synagogue. Since Zoroastrianism, the dominant religion in Persia, did not believe the king was a god, a royal statue in a synagogue could be justified by the distinction between two classes of art¹⁴². "Behold in the Synagogue of Shaphweyathib in Nehardea a statue was set up; yet Samuel's father and Levi entered it and prayed there without worrying about the possibility of suspicion. It is different when there are many people together¹⁴³." Why was a statue in a public place less offensive?: because a statue in a public place is less likely to be worshiped than in private. Even if the Persian government required that the statue be placed in the synagogue, nothing prevented the Jewish authorities from seeing it as a non-idolatrous decoration. We can be sure that if the Jews of Babylon had thought that the statue was really an idol, especially in a synagogue, the reaction would have been similar to that of the Jews in Jerusalem or Alexandria under Caligula. Essentially, the statue of a human king can be permitted; the statue of a supposedly divine king is an idol.

It is interesting to note that the Jerusalem Talmud calls all royal statues idolatrous since, being within the Roman Empire, all royal or imperial statues were of men claiming to be gods. The Babylonian Talmud, however, distinguishes between idolatrous royal statues and nonidolatrous ones, thus reflecting local conditions.

Another reason could justify the tolerance manifested by the rabbis of Babylon in the case of the statue at Nehardea. The fact that the statue was in a public place reduced the suspicion of idolatry¹⁴⁴. This argument would have had no value in the Roman Empire where such an imperial statue was by definition idolatrous.

Konikoff, quoting the Babylonian Talmud¹⁴⁵, notes the judgment of Rabbah, a scholarly Babylonian Jew of the third century, who distinguished between decorative statues erected in large cities and those set up in a small village where they would be offensive because they could be worshiped by the peasants who did not have the means of buying ornamental statues. The ones in large cities, as decorations, were permitted; the others, possibly idols, were naturally forbidden.

Concerning images on rings used for seals, we have a seemingly arbitrary distinction between convex and concave images. This distinction is based on the biblical prohibition against making sculpted images: “It is forbidden to use a sealing ring that has an idol on it. [Tosefta ch. 6] R. Judah established these distinctions: if the seal [on the ring] is concaved, it is forbidden to use it; if, on the other hand, it is convex, then it can be used¹⁴⁶.”

The reasoning behind Rabbi Judah’s judgment, which is nuanced in comparison to the absolute judgment of Tosefta, seems to be the following: what is important is not the image on the ring, of a god or not, but rather the kind of image produced in the wax by the seal. If the imprint was concave, that is, carved into the wax below the surface, it was not considered sculpted; if, on the other hand, it was convex, that is, in relief, standing out above the surrounding surface, it was considered sculpted and, therefore, forbidden. Even though the distinction may seem somewhat subtle, R. Judah was able to distinguish between an acceptable image, even if it was of a pagan god, and a forbidden image.

In nearly all the opinions and judgments issued by the Talmudic rabbis, their reasoning is based on the following considerations: Was an image or a statue made to be worshiped? Has it already been worshiped? Could it easily be worshiped? What danger does it present to Jews? Could they be voluntarily or involuntarily polluted by idolatry from it? If the danger of idolatry could be substantially reduced or eliminated, the rabbis showed themselves rather open to the use of non-idolatrous images. Konikoff wrote that . . .

from passive tolerance to virtual blessing is but one step, and the more liberal among the rabbinical authorities came very near to interpreting the law as allowing pictorial representations if they were not images of God Himself or of a being or thing whose image might be worshipped¹⁴⁷.

This attitude is illustrated in an Aramaic explanation of the Scriptures, a targum, made for Aramaic-speaking Jews who could no longer understand Hebrew:

Lv 26: 1 “. . . you shall not set up a figured stone in your land, to bow down to them; for I am the Lord your God.”

You shall not set up a figured stone in your land, to bow down to it, but a mosaic pavement of designs and forms you may set in the floor of your places of worship, so long as you do not do obeisance to it¹⁴⁸.

It is obvious that on examining rabbinical opinions, everyone did not agree with the one expressed in this targum. There are in fact a whole range of opinions: at one end, there is a rigorism that greatly reduced the category of permitted images; at the other, there was a greater openness which tended to enlarge this category. We have the example of Rab, a Babylonian scholar¹⁴⁹, who refused to prostrate himself on a mosaic floor in a synagogue, even though other faithful did, basing his reasoning on Lv 26:1 quoted above. We do not know if Rab accused the other Jews in the synagogue of idolatry or not, though it is probable that he did not, since he went in and prayed in the synagogue. Nonetheless, he feared being compromised in such a place and preferred no doubt to pray elsewhere. His attitude is typical of more rigorist rabbis.

What, in fact, distinguishes the two tendencies? It was rarely the very existence of images in the immediate environment of Jews, whether in a synagogue, in business and social relations, or elsewhere. Nowhere do we see an absolutely

rigorist attitude that equates all images with idols. The important factor was always the danger of pollution from idolatry that could result from contact with any given image or category of images. The more the rabbis felt free of this danger, the more likely they were to accept something that had not before been in the category of permitted, non-idolatrous images. Archeological discoveries of monuments of the first Christian centuries, as well as a new appreciation of rabbinical writings, clearly show that the Jews felt themselves largely free from the danger of idolatry.

We must deal with one more point: Was there a schism between the rabbis and the Talmudists, on the one hand, and the Jewish people, on the other, concerning the use of images? Such a hypothesis would be the equivalent, within Judaism, of what the advocates of the hostility theory claim for the early Christians: the Christian people, half pagan, half Christian, introduced images into the Church against the opposition of the conservative clergy. Goodenough¹⁵⁰ is the principle defender of this thesis on the Jewish side: the Pharisees and the rigorist rabbis lost authority over the people after the destruction of the Temple, and this uncontrolled, Hellenized people gave in to their desire to have images in their synagogues and elsewhere. As the centuries passed, however, the rabbis reestablished their authority and banished images in an attempt to restore the conditions supposedly prevailing before the destruction of the Temple.

Goodenough's position is now being contested from several directions. Konikoff¹⁵¹ and Urbach¹⁵² agree that it is no longer possible to accept the idea of such a rupture in Jewish society. The Jewish necropolis at Beth She'arim¹⁵³ was discovered in this century, and it is very probable that the sages of the Talmudic period were buried there in sarcophagi covered with images of animals and men. This discovery shows that these sages of Judaism were intimately associated with the openness to non-idolatrous images.

Archeology more and more confirms the close link between the rabbis and the people, thus affirming the collaboration between leaders and faithful with regard to images. The notion of a schism between the two groups is to be rejected. The

same close relation between clergy and people can be assumed among the Christians, and this greatly undermines the theory that the first Christians were hostile to all images, a theory partially based on the so-called schism between a conservative clergy and a half-pagan, syncretistic people.

The archeological discoveries of the last 100 years are beginning to undermine two received ideas: 1) the Jews were opposed to images, and 2) the Christians had no images. By showing that images had a place in ancient Judaism, archeology has made more credible, less fanciful, the intuition of the Fathers of Nicæa II concerning Christian images: they have an apostolic foundation whose base goes back into earlier Judaism. The conclusion of Meyers and Strange is, therefore, of great importance:

Studies in the mural paintings of the third-century synagogue of Dura-Europos, suggested by some to be approved by Rabbi Johanan bar Nappaha, leave open the possibility that narrative art and figural representation have a still earlier history in Palestine that is unknown to us. At the very least, we urge the reader to remain open to the possibility that the issue of Jewish art is still open-ended and requires much further study¹⁵⁴. (Emphasis added)

Notes

41. ¹Frey, J.-B., “La question des images chez les Juifs à la lumière des récentes découvertes,” *Biblica* 15 (1934) pp. 265-300. ²Dt. 5:8-9.

42. Dt 5:8-9.

43. Kraeling, C., *The Synagogue: The Excavations at Dura-Europos, Final Report VIII/I*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1956.

44. Simon, M., *Verus Israel*, Paris, Éditions E. de Boccard, 1964, p. 46.

45. Ouellette, J., “Le deuxième commandement et le rôle de l’image dans la symbolique religieuse de l’Ancien Testament: Essai d’interprétation,” *Revue Biblique* 74 (1967) p. 505.

46. Gutmann, J., “Prologomenon,” *No Graven Images, Studies in Art and the Hebrew Bible*, New York, Ktav Publishing House, 1971, pp. XVI—XVII.

47. Konikoff, C., *The Second Commandment and Its Interpretation in the Art of Ancient Israel*, Geneva, Imprimerie du Journal du Geneve, 1973, notes 3 and 4, pp. 44–45; A. Reifenberg, *Ancient Hebrew Seals*, London, 1950.

48. *Le Talmud de Jérusalem: Abodah Zarah 6, III, 2*, Paris, Éditions G. P.

Maisonneuve et Larose, 1969, p. 209.

49. Cohen, B., "Art in Jewish Law," *Judaism* 3/2 (1954) p. 167.

50. St. John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, D. Anderson, tr., Crestwood, NY, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980.

51. Ouspensky, L., *The Theology of the Icon*, Crestwood, NY, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1992; J.-B., Frey, op. cit. (cf. n. 1); V. Grumel, « Images (Culte des), » *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* 7/1 (1927) col. 766-67.

52. Ainalov, D. V., *The Hellenistic Origins of Byzantine Art*, (in Russian, 1900-01), in English, New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press, 1961; J. Strzygowski, *Orient oder Rom*, Leipzig, J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1901.

53. Weitzmann, K., "The Illustration of the Septuagint," in *Studies in Classical and Byzantine Manuscript Illumination*, H. Kessler, ed., Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1971, pp. 45–75 (reprinted in *No Graven Images* cf. n. 6); C. Nordstrom, "Rabbinica in frühchristlichen and byzantinischen Illustrationen zum 4. Buch Moses," *Figura* 1 (1959) pp. 24-47; C. Nordstrom, "The Water Miracles of Moses in Jewish Legend and Byzantine Art," *Orientalia Suecana* 7 (1958) pp. 78–109 (reprinted in *No Graven Images* cf. n.6); C. Morey, *Early Christian Art*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1942.

54. Goodenough, E., "Early Jewish and Christian Art," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 33 (1942-43) pp. 403-18 (reprinted in *No Graven Images* cf. n. 6).

55. Kretschmar, G., "Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach dem Verhältnis zwischen jüdischer und christlicher Kunst in der Antike," in *Abraham unser Vater*, Festschrift für Otto Michel, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1963, pp. 295-319 (reprinted in *No Graven Images*).

56. Gutmann, J., "The Illustrated Jewish Manuscript in Antiquity: The Present State of the Question," *No Graven Images*, pp. 232-248.

57. Gutmann, J., "Prolegomenon," p. XLV; R. H. Pinder-Wilson, "The Illuminations in the Cairo Moshe-b.-Asher-Codex of the Prophets completed in Tiberias in 895 AD," *Der hebräische Bibeltext seit Franz Delitzsch*, Kahle, P., ed., Stuttgart, 1961, pp. 54-59 and pp. 9598.

58. Frey, p. 276.

59. Cohen, p. 167. See E. E. Urbach, "The Rabbinical Laws of Idolatry in the Second and Third Centuries in the Light of Archeological and Historical Facts," *Israel Exploration Journal* 9/3 (1959) p. 154: "The consensus of opinion amongst the Sages in the third century (AD) was that all idolatrous impulses had been eradicated from amongst the people of Israel as early as the beginning of the Second Temple."

60. Josephus, *Against Apion* I, 22, W. Whiston, tr., *The Complete Works of Josephus*, Grand Rapids, Mich., Kregel Publications, 1981, pp. 614-616; *Lettre d'Aristée*, 52-72 and 84-87.

61. Josephus, *The Antiquity of the Jews* XII, IV-V, W. Whiston, tr., *The Complete Works of Josephus*, Grand Rapids, Mich., Kregel Publications, 1981, pp. 252–256; *Wars of the Jews* and *The Life of Flavius Josephus* are part of this same volume. 62. *Ibid.*, p. 376.

62. *Ibid.* p376

63. Butler, H.C., *Report of the Princeton University Expedition to Syria, 1904/05* 11A, ill. 1, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University, 1907; on this book see, L. H. Vincent, “Recensions,” *Revue Biblique* 5 (1908) pp. 592-96.

64. McCown, C. C., “The ‘Araq el-Emir’ and the Tobiads,” *The Biblical archeologist* XX/2 (May 1957) pp. 69–70; L. H. Vincent, “La date des épigraphes d’Araq el-Emir,” *The Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* III (1923); B. Mazar (“The Tobiads,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 7/3 (1957) pp. 138–139) does not question the historicity of Josephus; L. H. Vincent, « La Palestine dans les papyrus ptolémaïques de Gerza » *Revue Biblique* XXIX (1920) pp. 161-202; P.-M. Séjourné, “Chronique: Voyage au delà du Jourdain...,” *Revue Biblique* 2 (1893) pp. 138-142.

65. Konikoff, p. 56.

66. Frey, p. 280.

67. *Antiquities* XII, IV, 11, p. 256.

68. Goodenough, E., *Jewish Symbols in the Græco-Roman Period I*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1953, p. 132.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

70. p. 139.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 268; the English text is a translation from Sukenik, *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* XV (1935) p. 342; another translation: *The Babylonian Talmud: Baba Kamma*, I. Epstein, ed., London, The Soncino Press, 1935, pp. 567-68; P. Romanoff, "Jewish Symbols on Ancient Jewish Coins," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* XXXIII (1942-43) pp. 1-15, pp. 435-444 and XXXIV (1943-44) pp. 161-177, pp. 299-312, pp. 425-440; E. L. Sukenik, "The Oldest Coins of Judæa" and "More About the Oldest Coins of Judæa," *The Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* XIV (1934) pp. 178-186 and XV (1935) pp. 341-343; A. Reifenberg, "Ancient Jewish Coins," *The Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* XIX (1939-40) pp. 59-72; "Numismatics," *The Jewish Encyclopedia* IX, New York, Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1906, pp. 350-56.

72. Goodenough, p. 269.

73. Gutmann, J., "The Second Commandment and the Image in Judaism," *No Graven Images*, p. 3.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

75. Antiquities XVII, VI, 2–4, pp. 364–365.

76. Ibid., p. 365.

77. Ibid. XVIII, III, 1, p. 379.

78. Ibid. XV, VIII, 1-2, p. 328.

79. Ibid. XV, VIII, 2, p. 328.

80. Ibid. XVIII, V, 3, p. 382.

81. Against Apion II, 6, p. 625.

82. Antiquities VIII, VII, 5, p. 182.

83. Ibid. VIII, III, pp. 174-176.

84. Ibid., p. 182.

85. Ibid., p. 176.

86. Ibid. VIII, IV, 1, p. 176.

87. Ibid. VIII, IV, 2, pp. 176–177.

88. Ibid. VIII, V, 2, p. 179.

89. Ibid., p. 182.

90. Blau, L., “Early Christian archeology from the Jewish Point of View,” Hebrew Union College Annual III (1926) pp. 186-89; O. Camhy, *Paroles du Talmud*, Paris, Editions Stock, 1980, pp. 8788: “Here is what this throne was like. On top, there were golden lions and eagles: a lion facing an eagle, an eagle facing a lion, in parallel lines. There were 72 lions and 72 eagles distributed on 12 rows. On the steps below, there were a lion on the right and a bull on the left of the first step, both animals crouching; on the Second step, in the same positions, there were a wolf and a lamb; on the third, a tiger and a kid; on the fourth, a bear and a stag; on the fifth, an eagle and a dove; on the sixth, a sparrow-hawk and a spar row. All these animals were made of gold. . . Above the throne hung a golden menorah chandelier. . . The menorah had seven branches on each side. On the branches of one side were painted the fathers of the world: Adam, Noah, Shem the Great, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Job; on the branches on the other side, the seven virtuous men of the world: Levi, Kehat, Amram, Moses, Aaron, Eldad-Medad and Hur. On top of the menorah was set a golden jar full of pure olive oil for lighting the Temple lamps, and below a large golden basin full of olive oil for the lamps of the menorah on which an image of the High Priest Eli was painted. The same basin was also decorated with two golden ears [of grain] on which were painted Eli’s two sons Hophni and Phinehas, and over these same ears were two golden crowns on which were featured Aaron’s sons: Nadab and Abihu . . .”

91. Blau, L., pp. 187-89.

92. Antiquities III, VI, 2, p. 72.

93. Life 12, p. 4.

94. Roth, C., “An Ordinance against Images in Jerusalem A.C. 66” Harvard Theological Review XLIV (1956) pp. 169–177.

95. Life 12, p. 4.

96. Roth, p. 176.

97. Gutmann, “The Second Commandment . . .,” note 10, p. 14.

98. Wars V, IV, 4, p. 554.

99. Ibid.

100. Antiquities XV, II, 6, p. 315.

101. Ibid. I, XXII, 3, p. 454.

102. Ibid. XIX, IX, 1, p. 413; some readings give “paintings” instead of “statues.”

103. Ibid.

104. Ibid. XVI, V, 4, p. 344.

105. Apion I, XXII, p. 616.

106. Wars V, V, 4, p. 555.

107. Antiquities XV, XI, 3, p. 334.

108. Legatio ad Caium 132-139 and 152-158, A. Pelletier, tr., Les œuvres de Philon d’Alexandrie 32, Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 1972, pp. 159-165 and pp. 177-183; In Flaccum 41-47, A. Pelletier, tr., Les oeuvres de Philon d’Alexandrie 31, Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 1967, pp. 73-77.

109. Legatio ad Caium 197-206, pp. 207-213.

110. Ibid. 299-310, pp. 273-83.

111. Ibid. 299-300, p. 275.

112. Juster, J., *Les Juifs dans l'Empire Romain* 1, New York, Burt Franklin, 1967, pp. 236-7.

113. *Legatio ad Caium* 299, p. 275.

114. Frey, J.-B., *op. cit.*, p. 278.

115. *De Decalogo* 66-67, V. Nikiprowetzky, tr., *Les œuvres de Philon d'Alexandrie* 23, Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 1965, p. 77.

116. *De Gigantibus* 59, A. Moses, tr., *Les œuvres de Philon d'Alexandrie* 7-8, Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 1963, p. 49.

117. Goodenough, E., *By Light, Light: The Mystical Gospel of Hellenistic Judaism*, Amsterdam, Philo Press, 1969.

118. Ibid., p. 257; P. Sigal, "Art and the Halakah," in *The Emergence of Contemporary Judaism: Rabbinic Judaism* 1/2, Pittsburgh, The Pickwick Press, 1980, p. 76: "Thus too, Philo supports the contention that in traditional Judaism of that time, beauty in pictures and statues that adorned cities were appreciated, despite the contrary view of Philo that lauds Moses for banning art and

sculpture. The explanation for the discrepancy is to be seen in Philo's interpretation of the Decalogue as prohibiting art related to religion but not art as art, a view that coincides with that of the second century R. Simon b. Gamaliel."

119. Wolfson, H., *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, Islam I*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1948, note 22, pp. 29–30.

120. Gutmann, J., "The Second Commandment . . .," p. 3.

121. Konikoff, pp. 65 ff. and 89 ff.

122. Sukenik, E. L., *Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece*, London, Oxford University Press, 1934, and *The Ancient Synagogue of Beth Alpha*, New York, Georg Olms Verlag, 1975; S.J. Sailer, *A Second Revised Catalogue of the Ancient Synagogues of the Holy Land*, Jerusalem, Franciscan Printing Press, 1972; H. G. Leon, "The Jewish Catacombs and Inscriptions of Rome," *Hebrew Union College Annual* V (1928) pp. 299–314; A. T. Kraabell, "Synagogues, Ancient," *New Catholic Encyclopedia* XVI/Supplement (1967-74) pp. 436ff; N. M. Denis-Boulet, *Rome souterraine*, Paris, Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1965; E. Bickermann, "Symbolism in the Dura Synagogue," *Harvard Theological Review* 58 (1965) pp. 127–151; W. Elmslie, "Un hypogée juif," *Cahiers de Byrsa* VI (1956) pp. 105ff; E. R. Goodenough, *Symbols I*; B. Kanael, *Die Kunst der Antiken Synagogen*, Frankfurt, Ner-Tamid Verlag, 1961; C. Kraeling, *The Excavations at Dura-Europos: the Synagogue: Final Report* VIM, Ktav Publishing House, Inc., New York, 1979; N. Avigad, "Excavations at Beth She'arim," *The Israel Exploration Journal* IV (1954) pp. 88–107, V (1955) pp. 205–239, VII (1957) pp. 7392 and pp. 239–255; VIII (1958) pp. 276–277, IX (1959) pp. 205–220.

123. Morey and Goodenough, "Early Christian. . ."; Namenyi, E., *L'esprit de l'art juif*, Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 1957, p. 20.

124. Filson, C., "Temple, Synagogue, and the Church," *Biblical Archaeologist* VII 3/4 (Sept.-Dec. 1944) p. 88.

125. Konikoff, p. 78.

126. Simon, p. 46.

127. Namenyi, pp. 7ff.

128. Sukenik, *Ancient Synagogues*, p. 65.

129. Kohler, K., "Art, Attitude of Judaism toward," *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (1904) p. 142.

130. Landsberger, F. *A History of Jewish Art*, Cincinnati, The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1946; E. Namenyi; G. Sed-Rajna, *L'art juif. Orient et Occident*, Paris, Arts et Métiers Graphiques, 1975, and *L'art juif* (Que Sais-je? #2219) Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1985; A. Reifenberg, *Ancient Hebrew Art*, New York, Schocken, 1950.

131. Kaufmann, D., "Art in the Synagogue," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* IX (1897) pp. 254–267.

132. Sukenik, E., *Ancient Synagogues*, p. 56.

133. *Ibid.*

134. *Le Talmud de Jérusalem*, Abodah Zarah III, 3, p. 211.

135. Baumgarten, J. M., “Art in the Synagogue: Some Talmudic Views,” *Judaism* 19/2 (1970) p. 198; Konikoff, p. 96: “The passage in question probably disappeared from most editions because it was expunged by earlier ‘conformist’ copyists.”

136. Konikoff, pp. 93–96; Goodenough, *Symbols* IV, p. 22.

137. Baumgarten, p. 202.

138. *Ibid.*, p. 172.

139. *Ibid.*, p. 173.

140. *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, “Art in the Synagogue,” *The Jewish Encyclopedia* II (1904) p. 143.

141. The Talmud of the Land of Israel: Abodah Zarah 33, J. Neuser, tr., Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1982, p. 110: “[Here is the problem:] If it is a matter of certainty that [statues are] of kings [and hence made for worship], then all will have to concur that they are forbidden. If it is a matter of certainty [that the statues are] of local authorities [and hence not for worship], then all will have to concur that they are [made merely for decoration and hence] permitted. But thus we must interpret the dispute: in the case of a statue lacking all specification [as to its clear-cut purpose]. R. Meir says, ‘When they lack all specification, they are of kings.’ And rabbis maintain, ‘When they lack all specification, they are of local rulers.’”

142. Gutmann, “Prologomenon,” p. XVII.

143. The Babylonian Talmud: Abodah Zarah III, 43b, p. 216.

144. Baumgarten, p. 198, quoting B. Rosh ha-Shanah 24b.

145. Konikoff, p. 97; The Babylonian Talmud: Abodah Zarah III, 41a, p. 203.

146. Le Talmud de Jérusalem: Abodah Zarah III, 1, p. 209.

147. Konikoff, p. 96.

148. Urbach, note 89, p. 237.

149. The Babylonian Talmud: Megillah, 22b; Goodenough, Symbols IV, p. 22.

150. Goodenough, E., "The Relevance of Rabbinic Evidence," Symbols IV, pp. 3–24.

151. Konikoff, p. 90.

152. Urbach, p. 153.

153. Avigad, N., "Excavations at Beth She'arim: Preliminary Report," Israel Exploration Journal IV (1954) pp. 88–107, V (1955) pp. 205–239, VII (1957) pp. 73–92 and pp. 239–255, VIII (1958) pp. 276–277, IX (1959) pp. 205–220; M. Schwabe, and B. Lifahitz, "A Graeco-Jewish Epigram from Beth She'arim," Israel Exploration Journal 6 (1956) pp. 78–88.

154. Meyers, E. and J. Strange, Archeology, the Rabbis, and Early Christianity, Nashville, Abingdon, 1981, pp. 153–154.

CHAPTER 3

THE EARLY CHRISTIANS AND IMAGES

3.1 Introduction.

At the end of the preceding chapter, we called attention to the hypothesis of Meyers and Strange which, if it is correct, would be nothing less than revolutionary in its consequences: “Studies . . . leave open the possibility that narrative art and figurative representation have a still earlier history in Palestine that is unknown to us¹⁵⁵.” This hypothesis is much like that of a detective: his intuition points out the criminal, but he cannot prove it yet. For Meyers and Strange, the archeological discoveries at Dura-Europos, and elsewhere, of Jewish images that go back to the first half of the third century must have had antecedents, roots, about which we presently have no information. If we take into account the conservatism of ancient Judaism, it is hard to imagine that in so little time such a great transformation could have taken place: from the supposedly imageless Palestinian Judaism before the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, as claimed by Josephus, to the developed iconography we see in the ancient synagogues. Since the archeological evidence is undeniable and the dating of DuraEuropos is certain (before the destruction of the city in 256), the roots of this art and the attitudes that permitted it must go back some time before the actual dates of the images themselves.

If we suppose that ancient Judaism before 70 AD was uniformly imageless and iconophobic and that the Dura synagogue was painted 240 AD, we have a period of only 170 years during which the Jews could have passed from a militant aniconia and iconophobia to a consciously developed iconography. This length of time seems rather short for such a revolution, for, indeed, we are talking of a revolution. We, therefore, share Meyers and Strange’s intuition that first-century Judaism does not correspond to the imageless and iconophobic picture that Josephus and others have painted and that the roots of narrative and figurative art found at DuraEuropos and elsewhere go back much farther than current scholarly opinion is willing to admit. By its increasingly ancient discoveries, archeology continues to push back the possible date of the beginning of Jewish images toward the first century. As a result, it also makes more credible the hypothesis that Christian imagery, in practice and in theory, may have had apostolic roots.

The ancient Christian traditions, as well as the reasoning of the Fathers of the

Seventh Ecumenical Council, agree when they claim that the roots of Christian images go back to the Apostles. During numerous centuries, however, historians and theologians, Catholic and Protestant alike, have rejected the possibility that there is any historical basis to this claim, considering it to be fanciful reading back into history. Dumeige, a Catholic, expresses the dominant skepticism:

In his study of tradition, John (of Damascus) did not hesitate to push the beginning of images back to Christ and the Apostles themselves. He did this with more good faith than any sense of history. St. John's statement, which is quite surprising for us, comes from the fact that he accepted as proof the stories about Christ's sending his portrait to King Abgar and about the statue [of Christ set up by the women with an issue of blood] erected at Paneas (Cæsarea of Philippi)¹⁵⁶.

The Orthodox Church, on the other hand, has always believed, naively according to some, that history as well as theology underlie Christian iconography.

What is surprising in our time is the following: the still rather young discipline of archeology is beginning to make the traditional belief about the origins of Christian images less "naive" and more credible, that is, that there may be a historical basis in the apostolic era itself for Christian images. Archeology has opened up this tantalizing possibility by showing us ancient Jewish images which, with each new discovery, increases the possibility that first-century Jews accepted and produced certain kinds of images, even in synagogues. If, in the years to come, the intuition of Meyers and Strange is born out by new archeological discoveries from the first century, even modest ones, then it will be practically impossible to maintain the position of the defenders of the hostility theory that the first Christians were hostile to images of all kinds. Ironically, nonetheless, the central point of the hostility theory would thus be confirmed: the ancient Christians inherited the Jewish attitude toward images. The only problem is this, and herein lies the undermining of the theory's conclusion: scholars have greatly misjudged the content of that heritage.

3.2 The New Testament

A GENERAL APPROACH. As for the attitudes of the ancient Christians concerning images, it goes without saying that the New Testament has the first place in our study. The first thing to note is that there is a total silence about Christian and non-idolatrous images. It is important to note that the silence is in the New Testament texts, and this silence should not be interpreted as describing all the activities of the Apostles or first-century Christians. St. John himself said that “Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book. . .” (Jn 20:30) We could easily add that the Apostles also did and said many things not recorded in the New Testament. It is obvious, therefore, that we do not have a complete account of the activities and sayings of the Apostles. So, if we want to find out if the first Christians made or ordered any kind of figurative art, the New Testament is of no use whatsoever. The silence is a fact, but the reason given for the silence varies from exegete to exegete depending on his assumptions.

Those interpreters who lean toward iconophobia often cite the silence of the New Testament as a proof that the ancient Christians were iconophobic as well as aniconic. It is, indeed, always dangerous to draw conclusions on the basis of silence, but this is as much a problem for those who would like to give figurative, Christian art an apostolic foundation as for those who defend the hostility theory. Two factors, however, reduce the impact of the silence: 1) the selectivity and the purpose of the New Testament writings and 2) Christian imagery as a Church tradition.

1) The gospels and other apostolic writings not only do not tell everything, but the authors write with a very specific goal in mind. As St. John stated it, their authors wrote so “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. . .” (Jn 20:31) They included those things which might convince their listeners. To our great disappointment, they did not inform us about Jesus’s teenage and young adult years, the death of Mary, the activities of the 70 Apostles, the New Testament prophets, the way the Apostles died, or what happened to the young Church in Jerusalem after the destruction of the city. All this information was not essential for their purposes. St. Paul also limited

himself to specific goals. All this is to say that we should not be surprised about the limited and partial picture of the life of the first Christians as we have it in the New Testament. The apostolic preaching, even though only partially contained in the New Testament in terms of its volume, is nonetheless fully expressed in its essence. There is, therefore, theoretical space for activities of the first-century Christians that were not important enough or extensive enough to be reflected in the first Christian writings. It is in this theoretical space that any possible Christian artistic activity, if there were any, can be placed. We are not claiming that the apostolic Christians did in fact make or order images of Christ, Mary or anyone else or that they produced any symbolic designs. We simply want to state that the silence of the New Testament on this question does not exclude the possibility of some kind of artistic activity.

2) We have already discussed Christian imagery as a Church tradition, that is, that it is an activity adopted and developed by Christians to help them preach and live their faith. Even though Christianity is, as we know, an iconophile faith, it is theoretically possible to imagine an orthodox Christianity without images, not in the sense of an open rejection because the Gospel is supposedly against them but in the sense that Christ or the Apostles did not command the production of images as baptism was commanded, for example. But, even though an imageless, orthodox Christianity is theoretically conceivable, the only real Christianity that we know is the historical one that did in fact develop an iconography. Because its legitimacy was questioned by the Byzantine iconoclasts, this iconography became essential to the Gospel tradition. Therefore, in order to properly ground the development of the Christian artistic tradition, it is not necessary for all New Testament Christians, or even a large number of them, to have produced or used images as we know them today. It is quite probable that the vast majority of first-century Christians never thought about a Christian art. They did not have the time or the money to make or order images, even if they had wanted to. It is sufficient for our purposes that they did not show themselves hostile to a non-idolatrous art, and in fact, there is no evidence to indicate that they were hostile to such imagery.

THE WORD IMAGE (ΕΙΚΩΝ) IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

There are several references in the New Testament to concrete, material images, that is, those objects created by human artists. These passages can give us a certain idea about the attitude of the early Christians toward artistic images¹⁵⁷.

The first text, Mk 12:13–17, tells about the meeting between Jesus, on the one side, and the Pharisees and the Herodians, on the other, concerning the emperor's image on a coin. As he looks at the coin, Jesus shows an attitude that markedly contrasts with that of such rigorist, Jewish authorities as Rabbi Nahum the Very Holy¹⁵⁸ who refused even to look at coins because of the idolatrous image of the emperor on them. The attitude of Rabbi Nahum tells us nothing about what the early Christians thought about non-idolatrous images, but the contrast between Jesus's and the Rabbi's reactions seems to undermine any Christian rigorism similar to that represented by Rabbi Nahum. Jesus's reaction is all the more significant because the image in question was clearly idolatrous since it was of the Emperor Tiberius who claimed, and was considered, to be a god. We must point out, however, that the context of the story is not idolatrous, not even cultic. Jesus and the Jews were not in the Temple or a synagogue; they were in no situation where the danger of worshiping the emperor's image was even remotely present. It is difficult to conceive how it would be possible, even for pagans, to worship, out in the open, an imperial image on a coin. The danger of idolatry was rather remote. Nonetheless, after studying this text, Finney arrived at the following conclusion:

In short, the one and only New Testament pericope that overtly mentions Caesar's image (but only on a coin) treats the image in a purely matter-of-fact manner. It is implicitly dismissive of the larger issue concerning idolatry. All that we can conclude from this much-discussed pericope is that principled Jewish opposition to the idolatrous image of the emperor was not part of the gospel editor's theological or literary agenda¹⁵⁹.

Even though it would not be justified to conclude from this New Testament text more than that it can legitimately carry, or to speculate about Jesus's or early

Christians' reaction toward other sorts of images, it does seem legitimate to ask the following question: If Jesus did not feel himself contaminated with idolatry by looking at, or even touching, an idolatrous image in a non-cultic setting, what might have been his reaction toward non-idolatrous, Jewish images? The point of the question is to establish a continuum and to place Jesus's attitude on it. By identifying more or less rigorous attitudes on either side of Jesus's attitude, we be able to shed some light on the reaction of early Christians toward various kinds of images.

At one end of the scale, we have the most extremist attitude, that of the rigorist rabbis who refused even to look at images on coins. It is not difficult to imagine these rabbis' reaction had they found themselves in the presence of images that were really worshiped by pagans—idols. For Christians, this extreme position seems to be excluded by Jesus's reaction, as recorded in Mark. On the other end of the scale, we have another position, less rigorous, that of being in the presence of an idolatrous image—but not in a cultic setting, that is, in a temple—where there is little danger of idolatry or even of being required to worship an idol. In this situation, Jesus, and many other Jews, could look at the image and even touch it without feeling contaminated. We can even extend our continuum to a third position, still farther away from strict rigorism. We know that Jewish images existed, that they were considered non-idolatrous, both within and outside of a liturgical setting, and that they provoked various reactions and attitudes among Jews. (See the previous chapter.) Since we know that sculpted lions have played an important role in the decoration of Torah shrines throughout Jewish history, is it inconceivable that such lions existed in synagogues of first century Palestine? Is it possible that Jesus and the disciples could have worshiped in a synagogue with such lions? If so, what was their attitude toward them? We do not know the answer to these questions, and speculation, at this point, must remain just that, with all the inherent dangers of wishful thinking that go with speculation. It is not impossible, however, that at some time in the future, an archeological dig may find evidence of lions in a Palestinian synagogue of the first century. At that point, the above-mentioned questions will take on a totally different meaning. Our third position on the continuum indicates, nonetheless, a continued movement away from the rigorist pole.

The second New Testament reference to material, artistic images is found in a series of passages that identify such images with idols and idolatry. In the first series, we hear about the Beast and its image: Rv 12:14; 13:9 & 11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4. In these passages, the image of the is commonly identified with the emperor's statue¹⁶⁰, and those who refuse to worship it, and are thus put to death, are God's faithful. These passages are less interesting for us, because they fall into a category that already contains many examples: worshipers of the true God refuse to pollute themselves by worshiping the images of false gods.

St. Paul's visit to Athens (Ac 17:16–34) is the third reference. St. Paul seems to reflect Jesus's attitude toward the image on the coin. He did not consider himself contaminated when he was in a city "full of idols" or when he saw them as he "passed along and observed the objects of . . . worship. . .," even though "his spirit was provoked within him" at the sight of a whole forest of gods. Not being required to worship the idols himself, St. Paul, like most Jews in the Græco-Roman world, showed a certain tolerance toward idolatrous images. He would look at them, be in their presence, even touch them, certainly as struck on coins, without feeling himself contaminated. His attitude is in striking contrast to that of certain Jews who refused to enter a city whose gate had an idol on it¹⁶¹.

Finally, Rm 1:23 gives the meaning of idol to the word image by contrasting the glory of God with images-idols: men have "exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles."

3.3 Traditions Relating To The New Testament.

INTRODUCTION . Although the New Testament provides no examples of non-idolatrous, Christian images, it is noteworthy that the only artistic images that are condemned are idols. Since we know the attitude of Judaism about idolatry, it is not surprising that Christians had a similar reaction. However, nothing in the New Testament supports, except silence, the conclusion of the advocates of the hostility theory that the early Christians were hostile to all figurative art. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the hostility theory could be defended by supposing that Jews were uniformly aniconic and iconophobic. First-century Christians, following their Jewish parents, carried over their attitude toward images, but it is no longer sufficient to repeat past suppositions when there is no proof to back them up and, especially, when early Jewish figurative art continues to be dug up by archeologists. This evidence has seriously undermined these received ideas.

In the light of the new open-mindedness about Jewish and Christian attitudes toward non-idolatrous images, it is necessary to reevaluate another source of information about the primitive Church: traditions that paint a different, but not necessarily conflicting, picture from what the New Testament tells us. We have several traditions that associate the apostolic times with non-idolatrous, Christian images. Let us be clear here: in studying these traditions, we are not necessarily claiming that they are historical, but we are not claiming, either, that they are void of historical content. It is, in fact, impossible to establish or disprove their historicity. Skeptics, of whom there are many today as in the past, will exclude these stories automatically as nothing more than legendary fabrications. According to these thinkers, oral tradition is nearly useless for establishing history. Whether the traditions are historical or not in their present form, their cumulative effect is to associate in a favorable light images and the New Testament period.

More recently, however, ethnographic, anthropological, biblical and historical studies have given researchers a more open mind about the possibility of gathering historical information from oral traditions that were written down at a considerable period of time after the events or people described. And even if we

cannot accept all the details of such legends and stories, we can often see the general outline of the activities and people described. For example, no one can prove or refute the historicity of the three patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but modern scholars are more and more struck by the similarity between the general outlines of the Near Eastern culture at the time of the patriarchs as described in the Old Testament and the picture of the same period painted by the various scientific disciplines.

Jaroslav Pelikan, in his study *The Vindication of Tradition*¹⁶², notes that in many areas of research, there is a new respect for tradition and traditions and their ability to contribute to our knowledge of history. In some New Testament studies, for example, that of Perrin¹⁶³, the authors often speak about the various oral traditions on which the written texts are based. In the context of this new openness toward the idea of tradition, in general, and oral traditions, in particular, it is profitable to reexamine the traditions that point to the existence of nonidolatrous, Christian images in apostolic times.

THE TRADITIONS.

- St. Luke the painter. We learn from Col 4: 14 that St. Luke was a doctor: “Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you.” Modern biblical criticism has never doubted the truth of this statement, and, in the end, there is no reason to doubt it. Tradition informs us that the evangelist was also a painter and that he was the first to paint a portrait of Mary and the Christ Child. This painting is supposedly the model for the Hodigitria icon, that is, Mary holding the Child in her right arm while she points to him with her left hand. The first historical reference to this tradition is found in the *History of the Church* by Theodore the Reader, around 530¹⁶⁴, who was attached to Hagia Sophia in Constantinople: “Theodore the Reader, Hist. eccles.1, 1, quoted by Nicephorus Callistus Xanthopoulos: ‘[Theodore] said . . . that, from Jerusalem, Eudoxia sent to Pulcheria an image of the Mother of God, like the one painted by St. Luke¹⁶⁵.’” Theodore wrote about an event that took place in 450 when Theodosius II was emperor. Several Church Fathers and the Seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicæa

referred to this tradition in their struggle against the iconoclasts. The tradition that makes St. Luke a painter has entered into the liturgical texts of the Orthodox Church and is mentioned during the feast of several icons of the Mother of God¹⁶⁶. We are aware that the 400-year gap between the supposed event and the first historical reference to it poses a problem of credibility. The tradition exists, nonetheless, and is, by that very fact, historical material whether or not it gives us information about the attitude of apostolic Christians toward images. It gives us information about what some post-apostolic Christians felt about the attitude of apostolic Christians toward images.

- King Abgar. The second ancient tradition concerns the image of Christ supposedly painted for King Abgar V the Black of Edessa (Oukhama of Osroene) who had heard about Jesus's healing miracles. Abgar was himself sick and wanted Jesus to come to Edessa to heal him. Abgar's ambassador, Ananias, who was also a painter, was sent to Jesus with a letter asking him to come to Edessa. Jesus refused to go but wrote a letter to Abgar promising him to send one of his disciples later on. There are two versions of the story: Ananias painted an image of Jesus for the king, and Jesus imprinted his features on a wet cloth. Once the image arrived in Edessa, it became the source of healing. After the Ascension, the Apostle Thaddeus went to Edessa to heal Abgar and to convert the people. Steven Runciman¹⁶⁷ gives us the history of the tradition:

Eusebius of Caesarea¹⁶⁸ (325) relates the story and claims to have read the original letters—including one written by Jesus himself—in the archives of Edessa. He says nothing about an image. Runciman, believing Eusebius to have been iconophobic, says that he simply suppressed the section of his source that spoke about the image¹⁶⁹. The Teaching of Addai¹⁷⁰ (350–400) tells the story of Abgar and mentions the image of Christ that Ananias painted. In his Church History, Eusebius reproduces the passages that precede and follow the section in The Teaching that mentions the image. This omission makes Runciman think that Eusebius deliberately left it out.

In his Church History IV, 27 (600)¹⁷¹, Evagrius mentions the story about the

image which has become an “icon-made-by-God” (theoteuktos eikon)¹⁷² or an “image-not-made-by-hands” (acheiropoietos). Evagrius also tells how the image protected the city against a Persian attack in 544.

In *On the Divine Images*, St. John of Damascus¹⁷³ gives the most developed version of the tradition by saying that the ambassador Ananias was not able to paint Christ’s image, because the divine rays that shone from Jesus’s face blinded him. Christ noticed the difficulty Ananias was having, wet his face, took a cloth and imprinted his features on the cloth.

In his study of the primitive Syriac tradition¹⁷⁴, Robert Murray calls attention to the historical links, as much for Judaism as for Christianity, between Palestine and the “Syriac region,” that is, northern Mesopotamia and Adiabene. The Jewish-Christian character of the Christian literature from this area reinforces the impression of a close relation between the two regions. Even though the Abgar story is not confirmed by Murray’s study, it quite naturally fits in the context of cultural, linguistic and ethnic relations that are well known to history. Murray considers the outline of the Abgar legend to be historical and part of the distant memory of the Christians of that area. It is, therefore, more difficult to consider the Abgar legend to be a total fabrication.

- The statue of Christ at Paneas. In his *History of the Church*¹⁷⁵ (320), Eusebius of Cæsarea describes a statue of Christ he claims to have seen in the town of Paneas (Cæsarea Philippi). It is the statue of a woman kneeling before a standing man. The woman extends her hand toward the man, and he does the same toward her. The local tradition of Paneas, recorded by Eusebius, claimed that the statue was set up by the woman with an issue of blood to honor Christ who had healed her (Mt 9:20–23; Mk 5:25–34; Lk 8:43–48). Eusebius apparently accepted that the monument, indeed, went back to apostolic times. He also had a rather high opinion of the work: “Her house was pointed out in the city, and a wonderful memorial of the benefit the Savior conferred upon her was still there. On a tall stone base at the gates of her house stood a bronze statue of a woman. . . .¹⁷⁶” In the same chapter, Eusebius notes that he had seen images of

Sts. Peter and Paul and of Christ himself. Runciman says the following about this passage from Eusebius: “He admitted that pictures of Peter and Paul and even of Christ existed, but he referred to them coldly. . .¹⁷⁷” It seems rather that Eusebius expresses the opposite sentiment:

It is not at all surprising that Gentiles who long ago received such benefits from our Savior should have expressed their gratitude thus, for the features of His Apostles Paul and Peter, and in deed of Christ Himself, have been preserved in colored portraits which I have examined. How could it be otherwise, when the ancients habitually followed their own Gentile custom of honoring them as saviors in this uninhibited way?¹⁷⁸

Even if we suppose that the statue was not of Christ and did not go back to the apostolic period (Gustave Bardy thinks it was a statue of Æsculapius because of the “exotic plant” growing at the woman’s feet¹⁷⁹), Eusebius, apparently, the people of Paneas, everyone, accepted the tradition as authentic. Even though Eusebius has been identified as an iconophobe before Iconoclasm, he does not find it impossible or incredible that the woman-with-an-issue-of-blood would have honored Christ by erecting a statue of him. He finds the custom natural and seems to praise it.

Let us suppose for a moment that the statue was indeed of the healing god Æsculapius. This would then be an example of Christians adopting some pagan element, in this case a statue, and giving it a Christian meaning. If this is what really happened, we have an excellent example of what we know from other sources: at an unknown date, Christians adopted pagan, artistic forms which they then rebaptized by imposing a Christian meaning on them. The parallels with the Good Shepherd and Orpheus for Christ and Endymion for Jonah are well known.

- The portrait icon of St. John the Theologian. In the Acts of John¹⁸⁰, an apocryphal text of the second century, we have a story witnessing to the existence of Christian images, or at least a Christian image, at a very early date.

This story is very hard to interpret because the theological context of the whole document clearly places it on the outer limits of the Christian movement. We can even wonder if the group for which the Acts of John was written was not outside what we can call the “Great Church.” Junod and Kaestli¹⁸¹, having studied the Acts, characterize it in the following way:

“A succession of narrative elements, speeches, thanksgivings, and prayers” which nonetheless “manifest a verbal cohesion and unity on the doctrinal level”;

no references to the Jews;

no reference to a New Testament text having any great authority;

an unpolished, undeveloped and archaic theology centered exclusively on John and his God;

a Eucharist with only bread;

hardly any reference to baptism;

no mention of a community, no sense of Church;

a naive dualism;

a docetic Christology without an incarnate and crucified Christ;

a supreme, transcendent and immaterial God.

Junod and Kaestli come to the following conclusion:

In our opinion, these characteristics are the marks of an extreme form of pagano-Christianity, which, however, is not aware of its extremist position. . . The Acts its origin in, and was destined for, Christian converts from paganism and from the popular classes . . ., Christians who lived on the edge of the Great Church and its magisterium.¹⁸²

As for the date, the authors opt for the middle, or perhaps the first half, of the second century.

In chapters 26–29 of the Acts, read the story of St. John and his portrait icon. Lycomedes, one of St. John’s disciples, asked a painter friend to paint the portrait of St. John without his knowledge. When the artist had finished the painting, he gave it to Lycomedes who put it in his bedroom. He crowned the portrait with flowers, placed lamps before it and kissed it in honor of his “good guide.” When St. John first saw his own portrait, he did not recognize himself, but when he realized that Lycomedes had had his portrait painted, his “image in the flesh,” St. John advised his disciple to paint the portrait of his own soul with virtues:

. . . in brief, when a full set and mixture of such colors [virtues] has come together into your soul, it will present it to our Lord Christ undismayed and undaunted and rounded in form. But what you have now done is childish and

imperfect; you have drawn a dead likeness of what is dead¹⁸³.

This is the oldest written reference to an image used in a Christian context, around 150, but the story is found in a document strongly tainted with doctrines that have been judged heretical by the main stream of Christianity of all ages. The hostility of St. John to his portrait was used by the iconoclasts during the iconoclastic crisis, but since the document's Christology is clearly docetic, or "fantasist" as the Fathers of Nicæa II said¹⁸⁴, it is difficult to maintain its authority in other areas.

On the other hand, even if we consider the document as heterodox, how should we handle the episode of the image? Should we say that it is completely fictitious? Junod and Kaestli think that the Acts various kinds of material that "the author obviously did not invent in toto¹⁸⁵." Did a group of pagano-Christians on the outer limits of the main stream really have images that the Apostles or other Christians judged negatively? Or is it possible that the text's heterodoxy has also deformed St. John's attitude and reaction? When we categorize a document as heterodox, we suppose that there are orthodox documents or teachings to which the faulty document can be compared so as to determine how and to what degree it deviates from the standard. As for St. John's attitude toward his portrait-icon, and its veneration, we have no means of determining precisely what were the practices and attitudes of the Apostles and other orthodox Christians toward images at the period when the Acts was written.

It is important to note, however, that St. John does not call his portrait an idol or its veneration idolatry, even though the outward forms of veneration (flowers, lamps, kisses) are the same as those of pagan idolatry. Before he recognized himself in the image, he thought it was a god: "Lycomedes, what is it that you have done with this portrait? Is it of your gods that is painted here? Why, I see you are still living as a pagan!" But when he sees that it is his own image, St. John says that "what you have now done is childish and imperfect; you have drawn a dead likeness of what is dead."

The ethical argument of St. John is also interesting because it distinguishes between material colors that are used to paint “a dead likeness of what is dead” and the colors of virtues which can be used to paint a beautiful, moral image of the soul. The Byzantine iconoclasts, and iconoclasts of every age, moreover, have adopted this distinction and turned it into an opposition. We find it mentioned in iconoclastic documents of the iconoclast period¹⁸⁶. We can clearly see that at the time of the Byzantine crisis, the iconoclasts opposed these two ways of painting an image as though they were mutually exclusive. It is equally evident that the iconodules saw no opposition in the distinction between the two sorts of images. According to defenders of icons, it is quite necessary for Christians to reproduce the moral image of Christ and the saints, but it also permitted to paint their material images with material colors. It is interesting to note, finally, that few of the inheritors of the iconophobic tradition today would go so far as the St. John depicted in the Acts or the Byzantine iconoclasts and radically oppose the two types of images.

To better understand, let us make an analogy containing four elements, three of which are known, the fourth unknown. 1) During the iconoclastic crisis (eighth century), the heterodox iconoclasts turned a distinction into an opposition: a painted image of colors versus an ethical image of virtues. 2) For the orthodox iconodules, the elements of the distinction remained different but eminently compatible. 3) The Acts of John, heterodox document, written about 150, opposed an image painted with colors to a moral image “painted” with virtues. 4) Did the Christians of the main, orthodox stream accept the distinction without opposition? Some would say that the question is simply a projection back into history of an issue that concerned a later time. We cannot help noting, however, that throughout Christian history, protest movements of various sorts have ended up by being iconoclast and by opposing material and moral images. Therefore, while we wait for further documentary or archeological evidence, we do not feel it is illegitimate to suspect that the ancient Christians of the main, orthodox stream were either favorable to, or at least were not opposed to, non-idolatrous images.

One thing is certain, thanks to the Acts of John, opposition between material images and ethical images goes very far back into Christian history and that this opposition is identified, not with the central tradition, but rather with a marginal, suspect and heterodox tradition. In our opinion, it is permissible to suspect that the Tradition of the Great Church, which embraces both kinds of images, goes back at least as far as the opposite tradition.

- The image of Christ made by Pilate. Irenæus of Lyons informs us that the Gnostic Carpocratians “also possess images, some of them painted, and others formed from different kinds of material; while they maintain that a likeness of Christ was made by Pilate at that time when Jesus lived among them¹⁸⁷.” Irenæus does not explicitly say that an image of Christ was among them, but the force of his presentation assumes that it was there. The justification given by the Carpocratians has its greatest persuasive force if we assume that Christ’s image was among those they possessed. If the images were just of the Apostles, there would have been no need for a justification referring to an image of Christ made by Pilate. If the Gnostic images were only of pagan philosophers, the justification would make no sense at all. Finney claims, however, that “several modern commentators have misread Irenæus: he does not report that the Carpocratians possessed or owned this image of Jesus [the very one supposedly made by Pilate] or that they claimed as much, only that one had been made¹⁸⁸.” All the Carpocratians did was to justify their use of images on the basis of the tradition that said that Pilate made an image of Christ. Finney makes a free translation from Latin: *Gnosticos se autem vocant: etiam imagines, quasdam quidem depictas, quasdam autem et de reliqua materia fabricatas habent, detentes formam Christi factam a Pilato, illo in tempore quo fuit Jesus cum hominibus*:

As if all the above-mentioned things were not enough, these people even have images . . . which practice they justify . . . by saying that an image of Christ. . .¹⁸⁹

Grant is one of these “modern commentators” who affirm what Finney denies: “They have images . . . and they say that their image of Christ was made by

Pilate when Jesus was among men¹⁹⁰.” Hutin¹⁹¹ and Benoit¹⁹² admit that an image of Jesus was among those mentioned by Irenæus, but they do not interpret the passage as though the Carpocratians claimed to have the very image made by Pilate. We can, therefore, reasonably conclude that the Carpocratians had several sorts of images including an image of Christ and that they justified their practice by appealing to the tradition that Pilate had an image of Christ made. Hippolytus of Rome reproduces nearly completely the text of Irenæus: “And they make counterfeit images of Christ, alleging that these were in existence at the time (during which our Lord was on earth, and that they were fashioned) by Pilate¹⁹³.”

At the time of the Byzantine iconoclastic crisis, only St. John of Damascus cited this tradition; neither the iconodules nor the iconoclasts referred to it. The two groups must have known the tradition since Irenæ, Hippolytus of Rome, etc. were known to both parties, but no one quoted it. As for the iconodules, they did not want to support their argument by reference to heretics even though both parties justified themselves by appealing to previous historical precedents. As for Pilate, he is also a rather ambiguous ally. The iconoclasts did not refer to the tradition either: whether it be Pilate or another person of the apostolic age who might have made an image of Christ, or whether it was heretics who witnessed to the existence of such images at an early date, the iconoclasts did not want to add credence to the defense of their adversaries who claimed that such images had been made in the apostolic era. In fact, it suited the purposes of both parties simply to ignore the tradition about Pilate.

- Jewish Christianity. There is a controversy among specialists of Christian antiquity about the nature, extent, theology and liturgical practices of Christians of Jewish origin¹⁹⁴. Everyone recognizes the existence of Jewish Christianity, but it has been traditionally thought that this kind of Christianity lost its vigor after the second Jewish revolt against the Romans, in 135, turned into heterodoxy, and finally disintegrated. Certain theological studies and archeological discoveries contest this point of view and claim that a small, marginal, but orthodox Jewish Christianity existed, along with various heterodox groups, and that orthodox Jewish Christians continued to exist for several centuries. We are here interested in the symbolism of the Jewish Christians and the degree to which they made these symbols visible in artistic forms. Archeological excavations at Nazareth¹⁹⁵

have produced some important results.

At Nazareth, the traditional site of the Annunciation, under the Byzantine chapel, archeologists have found another, more ancient site: the grotto of the Annunciation which Jewish Christians of the region venerated for centuries. An incomplete Greek inscription on a column in the grotto can be interpreted, according to Bagatti, as an indication of the presence of an image of Mary¹⁹⁶:

H (prostrated) ?

YPO AGIO TOPO M. . . under the holy place of M (ary?)

H EGRAPSA EK I wrote there the (the names)

EIKOS EYKOSM. . . the image I adorned

YTH(S) of her. . .

. . .The M can be completed in many ways; but the word “Marias” would be very appropriate at that place. . . In the fourth line, “eikos eukosm (esa) (a) ute(s)” suggest a) two possible translations, according to the value given to “eikos “: “I arranged well that which suits her”; b) “I adorned well her image.” As is clearly seen the graffito testifies to the existence of the veneration of Mary or of her image.

At another place, the archeologists found a real image, a drawing of a man that Bagatti identified as an image of St. John the Baptist¹⁹⁷.

A second image of a man was found: “19: Lower down, fig. 120, is a figure of a man in profile. He seems to carry a chequered mantle and to be kneeling. He is 75 mm high¹⁹⁸.”

In the necropolis of Nazareth, tomb #79:

The most interesting things in this tomb are the sculptures and graffiti which cover the walls. On the north wall, to the right on entering, one sees a bust, somewhat ruined in recleaning, fig. 197, made with rough lines but not without craftsmanship. On the cheeks are letters, one of which is Y. There follows another bust, with a face like to the preceding, fig. 198, but with more letters. . . All these letters seem to relate to the Judeo-Christian surroundings^{199, 48}

These archeological discoveries concerning Jewish Christianity do not directly touch on the traditions relating to the apostolic age, but we have included them here because it is possible that some of these images and inscriptions go back to, or very close to, the apostolic age. It is quite possible that others belong to the second or third centuries. It is, of course, difficult to date all these monuments, but it is not out of the question that some of them, especially those of Nazareth and Dominus Flevit in Jerusalem, do go back to the Apostles.

- The interpretation of the evidence. It is obvious that modern science, does not give much weight to the traditions we have described. And even those researchers more open to what tradition can offer must finally face the final word: “According to tradition. . .” We can affirm, however, that very early, at the beginning of the fourth century in the case of Eusebius of Cæsarea, Christians believed that artistic talent and activity, used to serve Christian ends, was

compatible with Christian belief, and they believed that such an approval, or at least non-opposition, went back to the apostolic era. For skeptics, this argument does not have much value in the case of St. Luke the painter or King Abgar since the written references are late: 530 for St. Luke and 350–400 for Abgar. If we assume that all oral traditions precede their first written redaction, we can push the legends back farther into history than these dates would indicate. The question, of course, is how far back?

In the case of Eusebius of Cæsarea, we have something different. He was a Christian bishop, often classed among the iconophobes, who affirmed having seen a statue of Christ erected by the woman whom he healed, a statue with an origin in the apostolic age. Eusebius seems to have accepted the oral tradition and to have thought it quite natural for Christians of pagan origin to honor Christ in this manner. He also stated that he had seen other images of Christ, St. Peter and St. Paul which did reproduce their physical features; he thought, therefore, that those images he examined were authentic portraits. If they were just that—they were obviously not the very first ones ever made but copies—Eusebius is himself a witness not only to the fact that an artistic tradition was already well established but also that there was nothing scandalous in the existence of such images, even during the Apostles' time.

In the case of the portrait of St. John mentioned in the Acts of John, have evidence that images did exist at least in one Christian group. The problem of this group's marginality and its doubtful orthodoxy is not to be minimized; nonetheless, we know that Christian images did exist at that early time.

The archeological monuments of the Jewish Christian are the only evidence that is apt to impress the skepticism of those who advocate the hostility theory. Of all the evidence, these images go the farthest back into history toward the Apostles' time and can, therefore, give us some fairly certain information about the attitudes and practices of ancient Christians toward images.

The first thing to notice about the images found in the archeological digs is their symbolic nature: crown, vine, palm, lulab, etrog, cross, plow, star, the letter tav (T), etc²⁰⁰. Such Jewish Christian designs do not differ much from those of Jews of the same period, or earlier. Goodenough²⁰¹ shows us how the Jews used symbolic designs to express their faith. It is not at all surprising, therefore, that those Jews who became Christian continued the same practice. Even if we did not have Jewish Christian monuments as evidence, it would not be difficult to suppose that Christians used symbolic designs to express their faith. We can then begin our analysis by affirming that some ancient Christians drew objects that had symbolic value for them. Did the Apostles or other Christians of the New Testament draw them or have them drawn? We cannot categorically affirm anything, but the monuments leave the question open. We have to admit, nonetheless, that the drawing of symbolic designs is already an artistic activity. What about the content of the symbolic designs? Were they only of inanimate objects or of plants? The monuments we have so far discovered say no.

We see among them the drawing of a man (St. John the Baptist?) and possibly an allusion to an image of Mary, in the grotto of Nazareth as well as faces in the Nazareth necropolis. Certain medals found in the digs showed personified crosses where a face, Jesus's face, takes the place of the upper branch of the cross. The personified cross is part of Jewish Christian symbolism²⁰² which Jewish Christians expressed on their medals. The designs are very primitive, it is quite true, but it cannot be denied that they are designs of human beings, even of Christ or angels. According to the hostility theory, Jews and ancient Christians could have made only geometric designs, or images of inanimate objects; the most daring might have accepted plants. The archeological evidence seems to make this point difficult to maintain.

What date can we give to these monuments? It is difficult to give a more precise date than the second or third century, but two aspects of the monuments are important for our argumentation. 1) The designs are very primitive, artistically crude and colorless. The ancient Christians, as we know, were not rich enough to make or order luxurious objects of great artistic quality. This lack of refinement seems to indicate a rather early dating. 2) archeologists have discovered these images in a Jewish Christian setting and have attributed them to the "Church of

the Circumcision,” that is, to Christians of Jewish origin and not to pagan converts. According to the hostility theory, we should find figurative art (images of animals, men, angels, Christ) in a Gentile Christian context and not in a Jewish Christian one. The theory says that pagan, Greek converts brought images into Christianity. Due to the Jewish background of those who produced these images, the Jewish Christians should have maintained the supposed Jewish hostility to images. Archeology, though, shows us monuments that testify to the existence of a Christian artistic activity, however primitive it may have been, whose artists did not hesitate to draw human figures. Let us not forget that all this is to be found in a Jewish Christian milieu, at a date very close to the apostolic age and in sites closely linked to the New Testament and the apostolic Church, Nazareth and Jerusalem.

In the previous chapter, we feel that we seriously undermined the foundations of the theory according to which the Jews were uniformly to all figurative art. As a result, a new evaluation of the attitudes of the ancient Christians toward images is necessary. We should not be surprised, therefore, to learn that the first Christians, even Jewish Christians, saw no contradiction between the Gospel and a non-idolatrous imagery used in the service of Christ. Consequently, the ancient traditions concerning the apostolic age and images, seen in the light of these new discoveries, appear to be somewhat less fantastic.

3.4 The Pre-Constantinian Literature.

INTRODUCTION. The advocates of the hostility theory support their arguments by an appeal to early Christian literature. They quote numerous authors of Christian antiquity to show the antipathy these authors supposedly had toward figurative art. Since it is our task to examine the merits of the hostility theory, we must also examine these writings to see if they support this point of view.

We must admit right from the beginning of our study that the questions we are asking of these ancient Christian authors are not ones they directly asked of themselves: What is, or should be, the attitude of Christians toward non-idolatrous images? Is it permitted for Christians to possess, paint or order non-idolatrous images for use at home or in church? The questions are quite precise for us because we live in an era 1,500 to 1,800 years after the pre-Constantinian period. Byzantine iconoclasm, the Reformation of the 16th century and other iconoclastic crises have debated the question concerning the place of Christian images; these debates are all part of our past. In the heat of these controversies, the questions have found their classical form, and their classical answers as well: Does the use of non-idolatrous images by Christians contradict the Gospel, or are they compatible with it? We insist on the word non-idolatrous—it goes without saying that the use of idols is excluded—to avoid the confusion that is so often present in the literature on this subject. Writers often speak of Jewish and Christian attitudes toward images in general, as though idols, family portraits, symbols and personifications were all in the same category. By distinguishing between at least two classes of images, idolatrous and nonidolatrous, we hope to advance our understanding of this question by simply introducing what ought to be an obvious distinction. It seems that the ancient Christians did not ask themselves the main question of our study: Are Christians permitted to have and use non-idolatrous images? There is, at least, nothing in the literature of the time that indicates that they were preoccupied with the matter. We must, therefore, try to read between the lines, to deduce an author's ideas from the context of his work or to interpret what he does not say. In other words, we are often required to read an author's silence. Our first observation then is that the question of Christian images was not on the minds of the early Christians, or at least it is not directly reflected in the literature. And this is precisely the source of the various and contradictory interpretations that have provoked spirited, and even bloody, controversies.

The point of the following analysis is not to prove that the early Christians accepted the position affirmed by the orthodox group at the Seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicæa, or that they produced images such as we know them from a later period. The sources do not permit this, and it would be dishonest to try to force them to do so. Our task here is rather to study the literature of the ancient Christians to see if it supports what we call the hostility theory, that is, that the ancient Christians were hostile to all kinds of images, idolatrous and non-idolatrous, because they felt that figurative art was in conflict with the Gospel itself.

We will examine the literature on the assumption that there are at least two categories of images, idols and nonidols, and that opposition to one category does not necessarily imply opposition to the other. This is a fundamental element of our methodology. To confuse these two categories is a fatal, methodological error as much for the study of Christian attitudes toward images as for Jewish ones. By eliminating the ghost of a global, early Christian hostility toward all images, and by seeing that the hostility manifested in these documents is directed nearly exclusively toward idolatrous art, we hope to open up the possibility of detecting the roots of Christian art that go back, certainly to the pre-Constantinian period, and even, perhaps, to the apostolic age.

We will examine the literature of our period in the light of another factor that supports the hostility theory: the opposition between a strict clergy and a laxist laity²⁰³. According to Klauser's theory, during the first three centuries, the clergy was conservative, iconophobic and opposed to all images; they, nonetheless, had to give way little by little to pressure from the liberal, iconophile laity. The clergy finally lost all control and had to accept the boundless iconophilia of the laity. We will want to see if the ancient Christian literature supports such a clergy-laity opposition and if there are any indications to the contrary?

In our presentation of early Christian literature, we will follow the selection established by Koch²⁰⁴ who felt that he was able to trace an unbroken stream of

hostility toward all figurative art in Christian antiquity; the authors' names are followed by their approximate dates:

1. Aristides of Athens, 125
2. Justin the Philosopher [Martyr], 155
3. Tatian the Syrian, 170
4. Athenagoras of Athens, 177
5. Irenæus of Lyons, 190
6. Minucius Felix, 190
7. Clement of Alexandria, 210
8. Tertullian, 210
9. Origen, 246

0. The Didascalia, third century

10. Cyprian of Carthage, 258

11. Methodius of Olympus, 300

12. Lactantius, 300

13. The Council of Elvira, 300–304

14. Arnobius of Sicca, 311

15. Eusebius of Cæsarea, 315

AUTHORS AND DOCUMENTS.

- Aristides of Athens, Apology²⁰⁵ [125]

A) So the Egyptians and the Chaldæens and the Greeks made a great error in bringing forward such beings as gods, and in making images of them, and in deifying dumb and senseless idols. And I wonder how they saw their gods sawn out and hacked and docked by the workmen, and besides aging with time and falling to pieces, and being cast from metal, and yet did not discern concerning

them that they were not gods. (From the Greek text)

B) But it is a marvel, O King, with regard to the Greeks, who surpass all other peoples in their manner of life and reasoning, how they have gone astray after dead idols and lifeless images. And yet they see their gods in the hands of their artificers being sawn out, and planed and docked. . . old, and. . . worn away through lapse of time. . . How, I wonder, did they not perceive . . . that they are not gods? (From the Syriac text) ²⁰⁶

In his Apology, Aristides gives us one of the first examples of the Christian attack against paganism in which he makes fun of the “dumb and senseless” idols. Aristides thus takes the lead in a long line of Christian authors who generally repeat the same arguments. What is true in the case of Aristides will also be more or less true for those who follow: the Christian attack will aim at statues and painted images of gods—idols—which are worshiped. These attacks take their place in the much larger campaign against idols already started by the Jews and even some Greek philosophers. There is nothing surprising, therefore, to see the Christians use this powerful weapon against paganism.

On the basis of their polemic against idolatrous images, it is illegitimate, however, to claim that the early Christians were hostile to all images and that they could not distinguish between the two kinds of images. As we have already seen, the Jews were no less hostile to idolatry than the Christians, and yet, they were able to develop a figurative, liturgical art where the danger of idolatry had been eliminated. The polemic of the Jews and Christians against idolatrous images is, therefore, not an indication of their attitudes toward non-idolatrous art. We have here one of the most serious methodological errors of those who believe in the hostility of Christians and Jews toward all kinds of images: the assumption that the campaign against idols expresses a general hostility towards figurative art. This false assumption is, in fact, a corollary of the lack of precision in distinguishing between the two basic kinds of images.

Consequently, we must understand Aristides on the basis of what he wrote: he is against worshipping images of dead men and pagan gods. As for the question of a Christian art used in a non-idolatrous setting and of his attitude toward such an art, Aristides does not deal with it and tells us nothing about whether such an art could, did or should exist.

- Justin the Philosopher [Martyr], The First Apology²⁰⁷ [155]

And neither do we honor with many sacrifices and garlands of flowers such deities as men have formed and set in shrines and called gods; since we see that these are soulless and dead, and have not the form of God, for we do not consider names and forms of those wicked demons which have appeared. For why need we tell you who already know, into what forms the craftsmen, carving and cutting, casting and hammering, fashion the materials? And often out of vessels of dishonor, by merely changing the form, and making an image of the requisite shape, they make what they call a god; which we consider not only senseless, but to be even insulting to God, who, having ineffable glory and form, thus gets His name attached to things that are corruptible, and require constant service. And that the artificers [makers] of these are both intemperate, and, not to enter into particulars, are practiced in every vice, you very well know; even their own girls who work along with them they corrupt. What infatuation! that dissolute men should be said to fashion and make gods for your worship, and that you should appoint such men the guardians of the temples where they are enshrined; not recognizing that it is unlawful even to think or say that men are the guardians of gods²⁰⁸.

We recognize here, as with Aristides, a common argument of the apologies against the idolatrous worship of the pagans, but did the Christians of the first half of the second century know how to distinguish between idolatrous and nonidolatrous images? Did they draw symbolic or other types of images? This passage does not help us answer these questions.

However, in chapter 55 of this same apology, Justin sets out the objects in the world that form a cross and which symbolically represent the power of Christ:

And this, as the prophet foretold, is the greatest symbol of His power and rule; as is also proved by the things which fall under our observation. For consider all the things in the world, whether without this form they could be administered or have any community. . . sailing ships. . . plows . . . shovels . . . the human body . . . the nose on a person's face . . . the legions' banners²⁰⁹.

Justin clearly recognizes the meaning and the power of the visible symbol of the cross. Is it conceivable that he and the Christians of his time refused, through fear of violating the Second Commandment, to draw crosses? Even though the writings of Justin do not give us an answer, the archeological indications, which we have already studied in the section on Jewish Christianity, seem to indicate that they were not afraid to engage in this artistic activity, even adding a human face to the upper bar.

- Tatian the Syrian, Address to the Greeks²¹⁰ [170]. Tatian was a disciple of Justin the Philosopher, and, at a date difficult to determine, he wrote a violent attack on the whole of Græco-pagan civilization. In chapters 33–34²¹¹, he defends the good reputation of Christian women who, like male catechumens, receive instruction in divine wisdom. He sets out a long list of men and women whom the Greeks honor with statues while these same people were known for their shameful conduct.

At first sight, Tatian's Address the impression of being an offensive against art, in general, and against statues, in particular, but a deeper analysis shows that Tatian did not oppose statues as such but rather their being used to glorify unworthy men and women. He seems even to want to praise the practice of making statues of persons worthy of veneration: "A certain Melanippe was a wise woman, and for that reason Lysistratus made her statue. But, forsooth, you will not believe that among us there are wise women²¹²!" Tatian is even able to

distinguish between a good work of art, admirable in itself, and the shameful of the subject: “Why are you not ashamed of the fornication of Hephæstion, even though Philo has represented him very artistically²¹³?”

First of all, Tatian does not condemn Greek statues because they are idols. He does not even speak of the Second Commandment or idolatry. The statues are to be destroyed because they honor scandalous and scornful people. He seems to accept the possibility of honoring a respectable person with a statue and can recognize high quality art. Tatian does not recommend that Christians honor their illustrious men and women with statues, nor does he say that the Christians had any such statues. On the question of Christian art and his attitude toward it, he says nothing. We are once again faced with silence on our main question.

Tatian cannot, therefore, be taken as a witness for the hostility of ancient Christians to all kinds of images on the basis of the Second . The fact that he finished his days in the heretical sect of the Encratites greatly discredits him on many issues, but his heterodoxy is not relevant here because he does not address the question of images among orthodox Christians or among the followers of his sect. Even though Bevan is more or less to be placed among the advocates of the hostility theory, he is not very convinced either of Tatian’s value as a witness in favor of a Christian hostility toward all figurative art²¹⁵.

- Athenagoras, A Plea for the Christians²¹⁶ [177]. Athenagoras was a Christian philosopher, but we know very little about his life. He wrote to the Emperors Marcus Aurelius and Commodus to defend the Christians against false, pagan attacks: atheism, cannibalism and incest. After having mentioned the statues of the gods, Athenagoras continues as follows:

Now some say that these are but images, and that the gods are those after whose likeness the statues are made, and that as for the processions that are made to these statues and the sacrifices offered to them and made for them, there is no other way in which one can approach the gods: “For the gods are slow to show

themselves clearly to the beholder.” They bring in proof of this the operations performed by certain statues; so let us examine the power which attaches to their names. ²¹⁷

This passage is part of a general offensive against the idolatrous beliefs and practices of the pagans. It specifically aims at idolatrous images and does not deal with any other kind of image. It is neither positive nor negative evidence for the possibility of a Christian art purified of idolatry.

- Irenæus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*²¹⁸ [190] As we have seen before (Traditions), Irenæus informs us about certain groups of Gnostics in his great work against Gnosticism. On the subject of the disciples of Carpocrates, he states the following:

They also possess images, some of them painted images, and others formed from different kinds of material; while they maintain that a likeness of Christ was made by Pilate at that time when Jesus lived among them. They crown these images, and set them up along with the images of the philosophers of the world; that is to say, with the images of Pythagoras, and Plato, and Aristotle, and the rest. They also have other modes of honoring these images, after the same manner of the Gentiles²¹⁹.

In two other places, St. Irenæus tells us that the Emperor Claudius honored Simon Magus by erecting a statue to him because his magic was so strong and that Simon’s followers had a statue of him “fashioned after the likeness of Jupiter” and another one of his woman companion Helena “in the shape of Minerva; and these they worship²²⁰.”

These three passages, especially the first one, are often cited as examples of Irenæus’s opposition to all images. Coxe, the translator of Irenæus for the Ante-

Nicene Fathers, in a note that “this censure of images as a Gnostic peculiarity, and as a heathenish corruption, should be noted²²¹.” By examining these passages a little more closely, we notice three elements: the existence of images of Christ, the way Irenæus relates the tradition and the context.

The existence of images of Christ. Based on our analysis of “Traditions,” it seems reasonable to suppose that Irenæus believed that images of Christ existed among the Carpocratians. If we date *Against Heresies* to around 190, we then have the oldest evidence from an orthodox and historical source witnessing to the existence of the image of Christ. Can we discern Irenæus’s attitude toward the existence of Christ’s image in his work? First of all, he does not say directly that the image of Christ existed among the images of the Carpocratians. Was he embarrassed to openly admit that they had such an image because of the heretical nature of the group? We can only say that we do not know why. We are reduced to interpreting his silence and laconic statements. In any case, we can say that Irenæus believed that images of Christ existed.

The way Irenæus relates the tradition. Irenæus also tells us that the Carpocratians justified their image of Christ by an appeal to history, the precedent of Pilate: they had an image of Christ, “they maintain,” because Pilate made one. What did Irenæus think of this tradition? How should we interpret the “they maintain”: in a sarcastic tone, in a matter-of-fact, journalistic manner? If he thought that this tradition was unjustified and ridiculous, why did he not use the opportunity to attack a group of heretics for which he had no sympathy? Again, we have no answer to these questions. For his own reasons, Irenæus chose not to elaborate. It is certain, however, that he knew that a part, at least, of the Carpocratians’ justification of Christ’s image was based on an appeal to history, and he expressed no clear opinion about this justification.

The context. Irenæus is more categorical about the context in which Christ’s image is found. The Carpocratians crowned their images and placed them along side images of pagan philosophers, and “they also have other modes of honoring these images, after the same manner of the Gentiles.” Christianity, along with

Judaism, has always had a great fear of syncretism, of that “religious salad” that mixes all kinds of beliefs. We certainly have here a picture of a syncretistic cult, and it is not surprising that Irenæus was scandalized by their liturgical practices. Did the “other modes of honoring these images, after the same manner of the Gentiles” include sacrifices? If so, we clearly have idols and an idolatrous worship. Once again, however, Irenæus is unclear.

The idolatrous nature of the worship offered to the statue of Simon the Magician is more obvious: “Such was his procedure in the reign of Claudius Cæsar, by whom also he is said to have been honored with a statue, on account of his magical power. The man, then, was glorified by many as if he were a god.” Now in Irenæus’s time, he tells us that “they [Simon’s followers] also have an image of Simon fashioned after the likeness of Jupiter, and another of Helena in the shape of Minerva; and these they worship.” We see, therefore, that not only the beliefs of the various Gnostic groups were corrupted, but equally their worship was syncretistic and idolatrous.

First of all, it is obvious that Irenæus is a fierce adversary of any syncretistic worship that offers honor to “images of the philosophers of the world . . . and the rest . . . after the same manner of the Gentiles.” Faced with such a phenomenon, what other attitude could Irenæus have? His indignation could only increase if an image of Christ were introduced into such ceremonies. But now we come face to face with the essential question: Was Irenæus scandalized by the very existence of an image of Christ, in whatever context it was found, or was he scandalized because the image of Christ was used in syncretistic and idolatrous worship? Can we categorically state (and on what evidence?) that Irenæus would have been scandalized by an image of Christ in his own Eucharist liturgy at Lyons, or in a catacomb? Let us not forget that we are only, perhaps, ten years away from the time when a certain catholic bishop in North Africa had, according to Tertullian (see the section on Tertullian below), an image of the Good Shepherd or his chalice.

On the other hand, Irenæus speaks very favorably about an image of an unknown

king, perhaps even a supposedly divine king, and by that very fact shows that he knew about portrait art and that he could speak about it without identifying it with idolatry. He states that the Gnostics pick and choose the passages of scripture, rearranging them as they want to support their doctrines.

Their manner of acting is just as if one, when a beautiful image of a king has been constructed by some skillful artist out of precious jewels, should then take this likeness of the man all to pieces, should rearrange the gems, and so fit them together as to make them into the form of a dog or of a fox, and even that but poorly executed; and should then maintain and declare that this was the beautiful image of the king which the skillful artist constructed, pointing to the jewels which had been admirably fitted together by the first artist to form the image of the king, but have been with bad effect transferred by the latter one to the shape of a dog, and by thus exhibiting the jewels, should deceive the ignorant who had no conception [of] what a king's form was like, and persuade them that that miserable likeness of the fox was, in fact, the beautiful image of the king²²².

This passage reminds us of the text of the New Testament where Jesus looked at the image of Cæsar on the coin as well as of the texts of the defenders of images during the period of Byzantine iconoclasm; they bring out the relation between the person of the king and his image in order to explain the doctrine and practice of the orthodox. Could Irenæus have seen or conceived of a portrait of King David or Solomon? passage shows, at least, that he did not share the attitudes of the rigorist rabbis.

We can no longer naively identify the condemnation of a syncretistic and idolatrous worship, in which an image of Christ is used, whatever the justification of that image, with a rejection of all kinds of Christian images in an orthodox context. Bevan²²³ who sometimes takes the side of the advocates of the hostility theory, felt obliged to make a nuance in his evaluation of the passage about the Carpocratians.

From this passage, Protestant scholars commonly infer that Irenæus considered it wrong for Christians to make visible representations of the Lord: the Roman Catholic A. Knoepfler, on the other hand, contends that what Irenæus found offensive was not the fact in itself that the Carpocratians had images of Christ, but their claim that these images reproduced a portrait made by Pilate and their addressing the same forms of reverence to the images of pagan philosophers as they do to those of Christ: but the passage cannot be considered conclusive proof that Irenæus thought all representations of Christ wrong²²⁴.

Without other evidence to clarify his attitude toward images of Christ in an orthodox context, Irenæ's witness must remain highly ambiguous.

- Minucius Felix, Octavius²²⁵ [200].

But do you think that we conceal what we worship, if we have not temples and altars? And yet what image of God shall I make, since, if you think rightly, man himself is the image of God? What temple shall I build to Him, when this whole world fashioned by His work cannot receive Him? And when I, a man, dwell far and wide, shall I shut up the might of so great majesty one little building? Were it not better that He should be dedicated in our mind, consecrated in our inmost heart? Shall I offer victims and sacrifices to the Lord, such as He has produced for my use, that I should throw back to Him His own gift? It is ungrateful when the victim fit for sacrifice is a good disposition, and a pure mind, and a sincere judgment. Therefore he who cultivates innocence supplicates God; he who cultivates justice makes offerings to God; he who abstains from fraudulent practices propitiates God; he who snatches man from danger slaughters the most acceptable victim. These are our sacrifices, these are our rites of God's worship; thus among us he who is most just is he who is most religious²²⁶.

The Octavius a defense of the Christian faith in Latin, dated some times before, sometimes after Tertullian's Apology. particular passage is supposedly evidence for the aniconia and iconophobia of the early Church. Ernst Kitzinger, an

advocate of the hostility theory²²⁷ says the following about the above text: “As this passage shows, the radical rejection of the visual arts by the primitive Church was part and parcel of the general rejection of material props in religious life and worship²²⁸.” We see what great importance Kitzinger and others give to this passage; we will, therefore, have to examine it rather closely.

First, let us examine the context. Octavius answers an attack previously made by Cæcilius:

And now, as wicked things advance more fruitfully, and abandoned manners creep on day by day, those abominable shrines of an impious assembly [the Christians] are maturing themselves throughout the whole world. . . They know one another by secret marks and insignia . . . and they call one another promiscuously brothers and sisters, that even a not unusual debauchery may by the intervention of that sacred name become incestuous. . . I hear that they adore the head of an ass that basest of creatures. . . Some say that they worship the virilia [genitals] of their pontiff and priest. . . Now the story about the initiation of young novices is as much to be detested as it is well known. An infant covered over with meal that it may deceive the unwary, is placed before him who is to be stained with their rites: this infant is slain by the young pupil, who has been urged on as if to harmless blows on the surface of the meal, with dark and secret wounds. Thirstily—O horror!—they lick up its blood; eagerly they divide its limbs. . . For why do they endeavor with such pains to conceal and to cloak whatever they worship...? Why have they no altars, no temples, no acknowledged images? Why do they never speak openly, never congregate freely, unless for the reason that what they adore and conceal is either worthy of punishment, or something to be ashamed of²²⁹?

Cæcilius, and pagan Romans in general, attacked the Christians because their liturgical meetings were closed, secret and because they had no public manifestation of their worship, such as temples, altars or images. As a result, it was assumed that Christians must be engaged in shameful ceremonies. Nonetheless, Octavius the Christian and Cæcilius the pagan agreed on one thing:

Christians had no temples, no altars and no images. For Cæcilius, this was a sure sign of shameful ceremonies; for Octavius, it was the result of God's invisible nature. After accepting Cæcilius's accusation about not having temples, altars or images, Octavius makes an excellent reply explaining why these material things are not suitable for the Christians' God.

How are we to understand these three elements: temples, altars and acknowledged images? Since the attack originates with a pagan, we must understand the accusation from a pagan point of view: the Christians do not have temples, altars and images according to the pagan definition of these things. Octavius, obviously, agrees that Christians do not have consecrated buildings, constructed to house altars on which priests offer bloody sacrifices to an image of God. We have here all the elements necessary for the functioning of paganism in GræRoman antiquity. Octavius informs us what the Christians do not have, but he says nothing about what they do have. Are we to understand Octavius's answer to mean that Christians, around the year 200, had no buildings in which they met to carry out their ceremonies? This is an absurd question, of course, but at what date did Christians begin to construct buildings, or to adapt already existing structures, exclusively as places of worship? Or even, at what date did they dedicate a room, or some part of a house—a chapel—exclusively for worship? The development of Christian churches, as places of worship, seems to have been as follows: 1) private homes used as worship centers, according to the needs of the moment, without any space necessarily being designated as a "chapel." The New Testament gives us several examples of this. 2) Somewhat later, certain Christians, probably the wealthier ones, offered their already existing homes or constructed a new one with the idea of reserving a space just for the worshipping community, a chapel. The discoveries of Dura-Europos²³⁰ are an example of this second stage. 3) Finally, Christians built or adapted buildings whose primary use was for worship, churches as we think of them today. It is quite possible that the decree of the Emperor Aurelian (270–275), which returned church buildings to the bishops, is an example of this third stage²³¹. Whatever might have been the exact nature of the building, or buildings, in which the Roman Christians gathered around the year 200, it is certain that they gathered together somewhere, and probably by that time not in someone's home, considering the number of people to be accommodated. They, therefore, had one or more "temples" or "chapels," in the wide meaning of the words: a building or space used for worship. Whatever word they used to describe this liturgical

space, it was devoid, both in their minds and in the minds of non-Christians, of any pagan connotation. So, even though both pagans and Christians gathered together in buildings or in space used only for worship purposes, both pagans and Christians agreed that only the pagans had “temples,” in the strict meaning of the word.

Did the Christians have altars? Obviously not, in the pagan sense of the word, or even as in the Old Testament, where priests offered bloody sacrifices. But does that mean that any notion of “sacrifice” or “oblation” was foreign to the Christianity of Octavius’s period? Once again, no. We know, for example, that Irenæ, around 190, spoke of the Eucharist in sacrificial terms²³², as those terms had been purified and interpreted according to the Christian understanding. From the Didachê, between 100 and 150²³³, we read the following:

But every Lord’s day do ye gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure. But let no one that is at variance with his fellow come together with you, until they be reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be profaned. For this is that which was spoken by the Lord: In every place and time offer to me a pure sacrifice; for I am a great King, saith the Lord, and my name is wonderful among the nations²³⁴.

If the Christians of antiquity did not hesitate to speak of the Eucharist in sacrificial terms, it did not take long either for them to speak about the table (trapeza) which they celebrated the Eucharist as an altar. The Greek word, even in the New Testament, could be used for a pagan altar as well as the Eucharist table: “You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons²³⁵.” The Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, in Greek, still uses the word trapeza to designate the altar-table in a church²³⁶. We must, therefore, not understand the phrase “no temples, no altars, no images” to mean that the words sacrifice and altar could not be used by Christians for various material elements associated with their liturgy, once, of course, these words were purified of their pagan connotations. The Christian

liturgical tradition is evidence to the contrary.

We now come to the last term, “acknowledged images.” For Cæcilius and Octavius, what did it mean? It no doubt meant those images that Christians and Jews would call “idols,” and it goes without saying that the Christians did not have any of those. Does this mean, though, that Roman Christians at about the year 200 had no other sort of images? The passage says nothing to indicate that they did; what it does say is that there were no idolatrous images in Christian places of worship. Minucius Felix is silent, however, on the questions that interest us the most: Could he conceive of a difference between a forbidden, idolatrous art and a non-idolatrous art permitted under certain circumstances? If the answer is “yes,” did Christians actually have any symbolic or portrait images in their churches or elsewhere? Taking into account the restrictive meaning of “no temples, no altars. . .,” it would be hazardous to say that the churches of Roman Christians around 200 were absolutely imageless. According to Tertullian, we know that in North Africa at the same period, at least one catholic bishop had a Good Shepherd engraved on a chalice. We will study this case later on.

It is paradoxical that Kitzinger himself warns us not to accept the rigorist interpretation and not to reject the possibility that some sort of images existed. Having stated that the ancient Christians practiced a “radical rejection of visual arts,” he goes on, nearly contradicts himself and apparently accepts the thesis defended in this study:

The resistance to figure representations was, however, particularly strong, partly because of the prohibition of graven images which formed part of the Mosaic Law, and partly because of the very central role which statuary, and images generally, occupied in the religions of GræcoRoman paganism. Naturally, the resistance on both these counts was concerned primarily with those forms of representation which came under the heading of idols and lent themselves to idolatrous abuse. There were many of representation to which no real objection could be taken on this score. Decorative and symbolic devices, narrative and

didactic images—all these were relatively harmless, and it was in these guises that art did in fact enter Christian assembly rooms and cemeteries in the third century. Much of the art of the Roman catacombs betrays a studied attempt to avoid any suspicion or encouragement of idolatrous practices²³⁷.

According to Kitzinger, it is not at all impossible, then, that the Christians of Rome could have had “decorative, symbolic, narrative or didactic images” in their “assembly rooms.” In the light of this surprising admission on the part of Kitzinger, and in the face of Minucius Felix’s silence on the question of nonidolatrous art, we can learn nothing from the Octavius the existence of decorative, symbolic, narrative or didactic images that might have been present in Roman churches at the beginning of the third century. In any case, this passage cannot serve as evidence for the supposed hostility of ancient Christians toward all figuart.

The source of the Kitzinger’s confusion (“radical rejection of the visual arts by the primitive Church” and “There were many modes of representation to which no real objection could be taken. . .”) resides precisely in the confused definitions of idols and non-idolatrous images, of worship and veneration. We have here the old confusion that haunts nearly the whole study of Christian images. It started with the reaction of Charlemagne’s Frankish Church against the decree of Nicæa II, expressed in the *Libri Carolini*. This reaction was based on the faulty translation of the Greek text where the one Latin word *adoratio* was used to translate two Greek words: *proskynesis*, veneration, and *latría*, worship. Kitzinger’s study, as well as those of other authors, suffers from a similar confusion of fundamental categories. This lack of precision, projected into the period we are dealing with, is the cause of much misinterpretation of the data, written and archeological, of early Christianity.

- Tertullian, *On Idolatry, Against Marcion, The Shows and Modesty*²³⁸ [210]. By examining his written works, we do not want to ask Tertullian if he condemned idolatrous images. He obviously did. We want to know, rather, if he felt that all images were idolatrous; did he put all images into the same category?

It is natural, therefore, to begin with his essay On Idolatry. we limit ourselves just to this document, it is difficult not to get the impression that Tertullian, indeed, considered every image to be an idol, or a potential idol. In the beginning of human existence, he claims, idols did not exist, but . . .

when the devil introduced into the world artificers [makers] of statues and of images, and of every kind of likenesses, that former rude business of human disaster [idolatry] attained from idols both a name and a development. . . To establish this point, the interpretation of the word is requisite. Eidos, Greek signifies form; eidolon, diminutively from that, by an equivalent process in our languages, makes formling. form formling, , claims to be an idol. ²³⁹

God prohibits an idol as much to be made as to be worshipped. . . For this cause—the eradicating, namely, of the material of idolatry—the divine law proclaims, “Thou shalt make no idol” and by conjoining, “Nor a similitude of the things which are in the heavens, and which are in the earth, and which are in the sea,” [God] has interdicted the servants of God from acts of that kind all the universe over. ²⁴⁰

We have another passage from The Shows which Tertullian speaks in passing about images: “And in regard to the wearing of masks, I ask is that according to the mind of God, who forbids the making of every likeness, and especially then the likeness of man who is His own image²⁴¹.” The equation “image=idol” seems justified by Tertullian when he answers the criticism of a Marcionite who tried to accuse the God of the Old Testament of contradicting himself when, after having issued the Second Commandment, God ordered Moses to make the bronze snake: “But someone says, in opposition to our proposition of ‘similitude being interdicted,’ ‘Why, then, did Moses in the desert make a likeness of a serpent out of bronze²⁴²?’” The Marcionite quite clearly understood the scope of Tertullian’s definition, because he immediately noted a case, the bronze snake, which appeared to contradict Tertullian’s definition, that is, that every image is an idol.

We need to be somewhat more precise, however, about Tertullian's definition of idolatry. He speaks not only of the worship of idols but also of their fabrication. According to him, the Second Commandment prohibits both, because every image participates in "the material of idolatry," or according to Finney²⁴³, "the material causes of idolatry, or the total conditions requisite and conducive to the creation of idolatry." This nuance gives us a two-storied definition: 1) first-class idols are those images made to be worshiped and, in fact, are worshiped; 2) secondclass idols are images which have not yet been worshiped but which have the potential of being worshiped. All images are, therefore, directly or indirectly, contaminated by idolatry.

By accepting that Tertullian did, indeed, link all images with idolatry, even in two classes, thus requiring their being rejected in total, we accept Finney's conclusion: "On Idolatry contains four passages whose literal meaning amounts to an incontrovertible and unqualified repudiation of all visual images²⁴⁴." Bevan²⁴⁵ and Murray²⁴⁶, on the other hand, do not share this opinion and think that Tertullian only spoke of idolatry in relation to the first class and that he did not condemn non-idolatrous images of the second class.

Let us make clear that we are only speaking here of Tertullian's definition of idolatry given at the beginning of his essay On Idolatry. definition and its rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment, like all rigorist definitions and interpretations, clash nearly immediately with the Old Testament examples which appear to contradict such rigorism. Tertullian encountered this very problem and was obliged to answer precisely this question from a Marcionite critic: How is it possible to integrate Old Testament images with a rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment? This is every rigorist's nightmare. The Marcionites found an easy way to avoid the problem: they simply rejected the Creator God revealed in the Old Testament. This god, in any case, is not the true God and Father of Christ so what does it matter if he contradicted himself in his commandments and orders. Tertullian had to find another solution to his problem. In order to protect his interpretation of the Second Commandment and his equation "image=idol" and to protect the God of the Old Testament from any

reproach, Tertullian created a special category of images. These, apparently, were not made of the “material of idolatry” of which all other images were made. Because the bronze snake was a type, a prefiguration of the cross of Christ and ordered by God himself, Tertullian claimed that God issued “an extraordinary precept²⁴⁷.” He did not, however, ask the following question: Why did God order the making of an image after having previously forbade all images? Could God not have found another way of reaching his goal without creating a problem for all the rigorists of subsequent history?

But Tertullian’s defense is not limited to a special category and “an extraordinary precept.” Elsewhere, he increases the number of images in the special category and adds other reasons for their justification.

The form, however, of the brazen serpent which the Lord afterwards commanded Moses to make, afforded no pretext for idolatry, but was meant for the cure of those who were plagued with the fiery serpents. . . thus, too, the golden Cherubim and Seraphim were purely an ornament in the figured fashion of the ark; adapted to ornamentation for reasons totally remote from all conditions of idolatry, on account of which the making of a like ness is prohibited; and they are evidently not at variance with this law of prohibition, because they are not found in that form of similitude, in reference to which the prohibition is given²⁴⁸. [The emphasis is ours.]

Why, once more, did the same Moses, after prohibiting the likeness of everything, set up the golden serpent on the pole; and as it hung there, proposed it as an object to be looked at for a cure? he not here also intend to show the power of our Lord’s cross, that old serpent the devil was vanquished—whereby also to every man who was bitten by spiritual serpents, but who yet turned with an eye of faith to it, was proclaimed a cure from the bite of sin, and health forevermore²⁴⁹? [The emphasis is ours.]

We have seen that at the beginning of his essay On Idolatry, put all images in the

category of idols—real or potential—and required all artists who wanted to become catechumens to stop painting and sculpting images as well as worshiping them. At other times and circumstances, to answer other questions, he recognized the existence of images that were not idolatrous. He acknowledged the existence of decorative, symbolic and curative images. They could, like the bronze snake, manifest the power of what they prefigured, in this case the cross of Christ, and, even stranger still, they were not touched by the conditions that made all other images idolatrous. They did not belong to the category of images against which God issued the Second Commandment. Such images are, therefore, acceptable and do not pollute with idolatry those who look at them, use them or make them. We cannot help noticing the theoretical distance between the two conceptions of the image-idol relationship. We cannot deny either that both ideas are present in the writings of one single author.

How can we explain the two, contradictory interpretations? Perhaps, the best explanation is found in the fact that Tertullian was “an occasional writer. When provoked, he wrote. And when he wrote, he wrote just to convince but if possible to overwhelm his opponent²⁵⁰.” He was a polemicist and wrote passionately on the question that held his attention at the moment. He had no intention of creating a system and was, therefore, not necessarily consistent with himself. The rigorist position expressed in *On Idolatry* comes from his extremist side; he always preferred clear, unambiguous statements. On the other hand, he had to face attacks from his Marcionite adversaries and was forced to soften his rigorism to the point of accepting nonidolatrous, symbolic images. This “evolution” in his thinking shows the complexity of his character. According to the circumstances of the debate at hand, one or the other of the two tendencies would appear. Both are clearly present in his works, but the rigorist side was fatally compromised by the fact that, for strategic reasons, he had to recognize and justify the legitimate existence of decorative, symbolic and curative images.

What is, therefore, the result of analyzing Tertullian’s writings on the question of images? The ambiguity remains. He accepted the equation “image=idol” but also accepted nonidolatrous images. He justified these latter images not only by an appeal to an extraordinary divine precept, which he invoked not only for the bronze snake, but also for enlarging the category of permitted images that

escaped the thunder of the Second . Having thus accepted, some 500 years before the iconoclastic crisis, the essential argument of the iconodules in reference to Old Testament images, Tertullian can only with great difficulty be called as a witness for the supposed hostility of early Christians toward all figurative art.

There are, in addition, several other aspects of his writings that we need to notice. Tertullian showed that Christian artists existed at his time and that the Church accepted them among the clergy: “Idol-artificers [idol-makers] are chosen even into the ecclesiastical order. Oh wickedness²⁵¹!” On the basis of our preceding analysis, we need to be very wary of the expression “idol-artificers.” What, in fact, was he referring to? It is difficult to imagine that around the year 200 there were bishops, priests and deacons in North Africa actually engaged in the making of real, pagan idols, that is, statues or painted images of Zeus, Serapis, Athena, etc., which were to be used in pagan temples. Such a thing is not strictly impossible, since Christian clergy have been known to engage in many kinds of unChristian activities, but would it not be more probable that Tertullian, speaking in his rigorist mode, is referring to decorative, etc. images like the Good Shepherd?

Even on the question of making real idols, Tertullian is stricter than many rabbis of the same period. We have already seen that many rabbis, for commercial reasons, accepted that Jewish artist-merchants could make images of pagan gods for their pagan clients. If we take Tertullian as a representative of his time on the question of images, we see that the Jews were further ahead than the Christians in developing less rigorist attitudes toward paganism. It seems that the opposite would more likely have been the case.

There is a corollary point that needs to be dealt with: When does an image become an idol? This was an important question for rabbinic discussions, because if it could be determined that such and such an object ordered by a pagan client was not an idol, then the danger of contamination by idolatry was greatly reduced. Tertullian did not directly answer this question, but it is not

difficult to deduce his answer. In line with his rigorist definition and interpretation, an image becomes an idol by its very making. The only way such an image can become nonidolatrous is by destroying it. According to his less rigorist mode, he would probably follow the Old Testament itself in saying that a decorative, symbolic or curative image would become idolatrous as soon as someone worshiped it, as in the case of the bronze snake. In other words, the idolatrous character of an image is found in people's attitude toward the image rather than in the image itself. Some rabbis refined this definition even more; they distinguished between the attitude of Jews toward an image and the attitude of pagans toward the same image. A Jew could remove the idolatrous character of an idol by profaning it without the pagans knowing what he had done. If Tertullian had been able to say that, at least in certain cases, people's attitude toward an image determines its status, he would have once again put himself on the side of the iconodules during the iconoclastic crisis who based their distinction between an icon and an idol on the difference between veneration and worship, that is, on the intention of the people who use the image.

Did Tertullian represent the general opinion of Christians of his time or was he, even when he was orthodox, an extremist on the edge of the mainstream of thinking? We know very well that he had a tendency toward inflexibility which ultimately pushed him out of the Church and into the Montanist sect. Let us take his attitude toward pagan teaching, for example²⁵². It would be interesting to know where this attitude should be placed on the continuum of Christian thinking at the time. He condemned the teaching but not the learning of pagan literature, because the teacher had to praise, affirm and commend the gods to his students.

All the previous considerations come together in the last case we would like to study: the image of the Good Shepherd engraved on a chalice. The context of the episode is Tertullian's violent reaction, he was already a Montanist, toward a catholic bishop who absolved certain Christians of adultery. He attacked the Shepherd of Hermas, writing of the second century, which the bishop in question apparently invoked as an authority to justify his act. At the beginning of this passage, Tertullian speaks to his episcopal adversary:

You shall have leave to begin with the parables, where you have the lost ewe resought by the Lord and carried back on His shoulders. Let the very paintings upon your cups come forward to show whether even in them the figurative meaning of that sheep will shine through (the outward semblance, to teach) whether a Christian or a heathen sinner be the object it aims at in the matter of restoration . . . and the “good Shepherd” is Christ²⁵³.

But I would yield my ground to you, if the scripture of “the Shepherd,” which is the only one which favors adulterers, had deserved to find a place in the Divine canon; if it had not been judged by every council of Churches (even of your own) among apocryphal and false (writings); itself adulterous, and hence a patroness of its comrades; from which in other respects too, you derive initiation; to which, perchance, that “Shepherd” will play the patron whom you depict upon your (sacramental) chalice, (depict, I say, as) himself withal a prostitute of the Christian sacrament, (and hence) worthily both the idol of drunkenness, and the brize [sic ?] of adultery by which the chalice will quickly be followed (a chalice) from which you sip nothing more readily than (the flavor of) the “ewe” of (your) second repentance! I, however, imbibe the Scriptures of that Shepherd who cannot be broken²⁵⁴.

Tertullian saw the image of the Good Shepherd on the chalice used in the catholic Eucharist as a symbol of the supposedly laxist attitude of the bishop who forgave fornication and adultery, an attitude that was supported by the Shepherd of Hermas.

First of all, this passage is evidence that the catholic Church, either in North Africa or in Rome, depending on the identity of the bishop in question, used at least one symbolic, decorative image in the main service of the Church. This is, indeed, precious evidence, and there is no reason to doubt its authenticity. It is, thus, the oldest proof that the main stream accepted and used non-idolatrous images. Even more important is the place of the image: on the chalice which was handled by a priest or a bishop at the heart of the Church’s liturgical life.

Tertullian seems to indicate there were many such chalices. Klauser²⁵⁵ claimed that the pressure of the laity against the conservatism and opposition of the clergy forced the bishops and priests to accept images, or that the laity adopted practices that the clergy knew nothing about. At least in this present case, no one can claim that the clergy knew nothing about the existence of this image and that they did not approve it. The fact that the image was found on a chalice, perhaps on many chalices, rather gives credence to the opposite hypothesis: it is possible that the clergy ordered the chalice with an image of the Good Shepherd on it. It is not impossible either, taking into account Tertullian's accusation that artists, "idol-artificers," were among the clergy, that the image was made by a cleric.

What was Tertullian's attitude toward the image of the Good Shepherd? There are two sides to his reaction: 1) the Good Shepherd as a symbol of the "laxist" bishop's attitude and action; 2) the image itself. First of all, we know his attitude toward the Shepherd of Hermas toward everything he identified as laxism. It is possible that, at this point in his life when growing fanaticism went hand in hand with aging, he was no longer able to distinguish, on the one hand, between a symbol, the Good Shepherd—which in itself had no intrinsic relation to his adversaries and their attitude toward a second repentance—and, on the other hand, his adversaries themselves. Tertullian seems to have been blinded by his fanaticism. What is more important, and more difficult to determine, is his attitude toward the symbolic image on the chalice, as image. Was he able to conceive of a chalice carrying a different kind of image? Let us suppose that the image was of a fisherman, Noah or Jonas. Would he have called such an image an idol or a decorative image? We cannot determine his answer, because the real image was of the Good Shepherd, and his passion makes it impossible to separate the two questions. His extremely violent language and fanaticism may have pushed him back into his rigorist mode, condemning all images as idols. His argument against the bishop would have been even stronger if he could have added the charge of idolatry to that of laxism, but he did not accuse the bishop of idolatry, thus implying that the image of the Good Shepherd was not in the category of idols.

In the final analysis, the importance of this passage is not found in Tertullian's attitude toward the Good Shepherd, either as idol or symbolic image. We have

already seen that his attitude was not consistent, but changing. The passage is important, rather, for the information it gives us about what was acceptable in the liturgy of the Church, at least in one local Church, at the beginning of the third century. For that, if for nothing else, we must thank the tempestuous lawyer from North Africa.

- Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen*, *The Instructor*, *The Stromata*²⁵⁶ [205]. As Butterworth already noted 70 years ago²⁵⁷, two sources feed Clement's attitudes toward art and images of all kinds: Israel and Greece. From these two sources, Clement worked out a rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment and a certain disdain for the material world. Up to a point, Clement provides evidence in favor of the theory that the ancient Christians were hostile to all images. We say "up to a point" because in the two cases—the Second Commandment and disdain for the material world—Clement had to face certain difficulties when his conceptions ran up against other factors.

First of all, let us take his interpretation of the Second Commandment. We have to admit that in certain passages, Clement seems to have, indeed, excluded the making of all images; he quotes the Sibyl:

Happy, therefore, so to say, alone are all those with one accord "who shall refuse to look on any temples and altars, worthless seats of dumb stones, and idols of stone, and images made by hands. . ." For we are expressly prohibited from exercising a deceptive art: "For thou shalt not make," says the prophet, "the likeness of anything which is in heaven above or in the earth beneath²⁵⁸."

For Clement, the Christian faith is superior to pagan religion, because it is older; the philosophers learned their wisdom from Moses. In the following passage, we hear the echo of this idea as well as the rigorism of his interpretation of the Second commandment:

And again, “Don’t wear a ring, nor engrave on it the images of the gods,” enjoins Pythagoras; as Moses, ages before, enacted expressly, that neither a graven, nor molten, nor molded, nor painted likeness should be made; so that we are not to cleave to things of sense, but pass to intellectual objects: for familiarity with the sight disparages the reverence of what is divine; and worship that which is immaterial by matter is to dishonor it by sense²⁵⁹.

Clement is so strongly convinced that the Second Commandment prohibits all images that he is ready to contradict the Scriptures by transforming the cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant into allegory:

And those golden figures, each of them with six wings, signify. . . [Clement indicates several possible meanings] . . . For He who prohibited the making of a graven image, would never Himself have made an image in the likeness of holy things. Nor is there at all any composite thing, and creature endowed with sensation, of the sort in heaven. But the face is a symbol of the rational soul, and the wings are the lofty ministers and energies of powers right and left; and the voice is delightful glory in ceaseless contemplation. Let it suffice that the mystic interpretation has advanced so far²⁶⁰.

This last passage shows that we cannot accuse Clement of inconsistency, as in Tertullian’s case. Both men recognized the inconsistency and caprice of a God who, in one chapter, forbids the making of all images and, in another, orders Moses to make cherubim and a bronze snake. The Marcionites and others saw very clearly the contradiction and required an answer. Clement believed that all images fell under the prohibition of the Second , but he also felt the force of the Marcionite reproach, without having mentioned it specifically. He, therefore, felt obliged to solve the problem of inconsistency by dissolving the historicity of the passage into allegory, and in so doing, he preserved the intellectual integrity of his rigorism but falsified the Scriptures. According to Clement, God was not inconsistent, because he did not really order the making of the cherubim. Clement solved his problem, but at what price?

We again clearly see the dilemma of all rigorist interpretations of the Decalogue: how to interpret the nonidolatrourous images of the Old . This problem has essentially two solutions, Tertullian's or Clement's: 1) compromise the integrity of the rigorism by admitting a category of decorative, symbolic, curative images or 2) preserve the rigor and the integrity of the theory, but falsify the Scriptures themselves. It is noteworthy that Clement nowhere mentions the cherubim in the Temple or the other non-idolatrourous images of the Old Testament: to allegorize the historicity of these episodes would in fact undermine the credibility of allegory as a method of interpreting the Scriptures. It is quite possible, however, that intellectual consistency would have again won out over historicity if Clement had ever considered the question.

In another passage, Clement seems to have diluted somewhat the rigor of his interpretation of the Second Commandment, if he did not simply recognize, like Tertullian, a special category of images:

And let our seals be either a dove, or a fish, or a ship scud ding before the wind, or a musical lyre, which Polycrates used or a ship's anchor, which Seleucus got engraved as a device; and if there be one fishing, he will remember the Apostle, and the children drawn out of the water. For we are not to delineate the faces of idols, we who are prohibited to cleave to them; nor a sword, nor a bow, following as we do, peace; nor drinking-cups, being temperate.

Many of the licentious have their lovers engraved, or their mistresses, as if they wished to make it impossible ever to forget their amatory indulgences, by being perpetually put in mind of their licentiousness.

This passage has become very famous and controversial because of its importance for Clement's attitude toward images. The basic question can be stated this way: How many images did Clement approve for Christian signet rings; five or six? It is clear that he accepted at least five: dove, fish, ship, lyre and anchor, but did he also accept the image of a fisherman, that is, a human

being²⁶¹? The various translations are ambiguous because Clement's Greek is also ambiguous: “. . . and if there be one fishing, he will remember the Apostle, and the children drawn out of the water²⁶².” Whether Clement accepted the image of a fisherman or not, there is no lack of seals from antiquity bearing such an image, thus showing its popularity²⁶³.¹¹³ We have already seen, in our study of Tertullian, that the Catholics of North Africa used the image of the Good Shepherd; it is not impossible that the Christians of Alexandria used another symbolic image of a human being on their signet rings, in this case a fisherman. In terms of the text itself, an image of fisherman would fit in quite naturally and logically in the list of symbolic images, and it has a Christian meaning. If the list ends with the anchor, the statement about someone fishing is out of place and does not make sense.

Even if we exclude the fisherman from the images approved by Clement, the five other images constitute a class of non-idolatrous, symbolic images that Christians could use without any danger of idolatry. It seems that the recognition of such a category of images—with or without the fisherman—constitutes a serious weakening of the rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment, that is, a rejection of all figurative art. It is, at least, a serious inconsistency with which an intellectual like Clement could hardly have been comfortable. After all, he denied the historical meaning of the cherubim precisely to maintain such a theoretical consistency.

Further along in this text, Clement continues to prohibit “faces of idols.” We are not surprised by such a statement; what could be more natural, but he also prohibits symbolic images that clash with the Christian message because of their associations, not because of idolatry: the sword and the bow. These objects represent war, and Christians are for peace. The cup represents drunkenness, while Christians are for temperance. This is yet a fourth category of images, obviously forbidden to Christians: portraits of lovers and mistresses that “many of the licentious have” on their rings. Clement does not say that these portraits are idolatrous, but that they symbolize debauchery. Elsewhere²⁶⁴, he condemns pornographic images which are not all idolatrous. It appears that Clement of Alexandria was quite able to nuance various kinds of images and recognize four categories: 1) idols, 2) pornographic scenes or portraits of licentious people, 3)

symbolic images incompatible with the Gospel, and 4) symbolic images that could worthily represent some aspect of the Gospel.

An interesting question comes up regarding the second category of images. Clement excluded the portraits of homosexual lovers and mistresses because of the shameful eroticism that they symbolized, but what would he have thought of a portrait of someone worthy of admiration, let us say, the founder of the catechetical school of Alexandria, Pantænus, or St. Paul? We cannot automatically suppose that he would have condemned all kinds of portraits simply because he rejected a certain type of portrait. Let us not forget that Irenæus seemed to accept portraits, especially the emperor's. In any case, we are faced with silence, and we cannot answer such a question. We cannot exclude, however, the possibility that Clement would have accepted non-idolatrous portraits of persons worthy of admiration.

How should we understand Clement's distinction between symbol and image? "Clement regards the symbols of the divine law as symbols merely, and not images in the sense of the Decalogue²⁶⁵." This distinction is often used, by Tertullian, Clement, the Old Testament itself and many iconophobes, to save the rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment from inconsistency when faced with the "symbolic" representations of the Old Testament and the images of the first Christian centuries. Those who make this distinction say that the cherubim, the bronze snake, the Good Shepherd, etc. are symbols and not images; these, therefore, do not constitute a violation of the Second Commandment. This line of reasoning is somewhat hard to follow when we look at what the category of symbols contains, a category that supposedly does not contain images but only symbols: cherubim, a snake, bulls, lions, flowers, fruit, the face of a man, a man and a sheep, a fish, an anchor, a dove, a lyre, a ship, maybe a fisherman and others. According to this logic, what is, in fact, the difference between a symbol and an image? We would say they are simply two categories of artistic representation: image represents the general category of artistic designs which, in this case, express the idea of likeness between a prototype and the pictured object; symbol, still speaking of a graphic design, is a subcategory of images and represents rather the particular meaning recognized in the design. The two categories are obviously not mutually exclusive; they

overlap. It is too artificial to consider images and symbols as mutually exclusive for no other reason than to maintain a rigorist prohibition of all images, but not symbols. Symbols are in fact images, in the broad sense, and do not cease being symbols when they incorporate plants, animals or humans. It is much more natural and convincing to say that the Second Commandment prohibits any and all images of whatever kind used as idols but does not condemn images used for non-idolatrous purposes. This is, in fact, what biblical, Jewish and Christian practice shows. The conscious, theological justification of this practice, however, was only to come at a later stage, in controversy.

The last point to consider is linked to the passage about the seals and is expressed by the word concession the following quotation:

Clement, indeed, in one passage makes a concession in regard to the designs on signet-rings worn by Christians; he suggests not only the representation of inanimate things—a ship, a lyre, an anchor—but even that of a dove or a fish. It seems unlikely that he would have allowed a human figure²⁶⁶.

Klauser²⁶⁷ also uses the passage about signet rings as evidence for his theory that says that the laity pushed the conservative and iconophobic clergy to make concessions concerning images. The comment of Murray on this point seems very accurate²⁶⁸. She thinks that it is rather Clement who encouraged hesitant laymen to choose images from among those that they could use without danger of contamination. Considering the three rejected categories of images mentioned above, it is not impossible that Clement used a reassuring tone in his approval. We can imagine him saying, “I know you need images on your signet rings. Do not use these images, but it is all right, do not worry, you can use one of these.” The theory propounded by Klauser and Bevan is interesting, but it is entirely tied to the general supposition of a normative and universal hostility to all images among ancient Christians. By undermining the basic supposition on which the theory rests, we feel we have deprived it of credibility.

If we accept that Clement of Alexandria could theoretically distinguish between idols and graphic symbols, and we have seen that on one very narrow question, signet rings, he could in fact do so, do we not have, in part anyway, the theoretical basis on which to construct the theory and practice of Christian art? By using his own four categories, we can see that he was not opposed to the use of all figurative art among Christians. He can even be taken as a sort of founding father of Christian art. We know that he encouraged Christians to purify pagan music of its corruptions and to use it for the glory of God²⁶⁹. Could he not have done the same for visual art? For a thinker like Clement, immersed as he was in all kinds of symbolism, literary, philosophic, poetic, verbal, etc. ²⁷⁰, is it conceivable that he would have rejected a visible, artistic and Christian symbolism, a symbolism that had been purified of idolatrous and licentious impurities? It is obvious that he accepted this kind of symbolism for signet rings, but did he do it under other circumstances as well? We cannot answer this most interesting question; we have no references in his writings which would help us find one, but nothing indicates that the last category of images mentioned above was for Clement a closed category. Others could, therefore, add to it.

We must now examine other passages in Clement's writings that manifest his attitude toward art and images. We have the following passage from The Stromata:

The Eighth Commandment

And after this is the command respecting theft. As, then, he that steals what is another's, doing great wrong, rightly incurs ills suitable to his deserts; so also does he, who arrogates to himself divine works by the art of the statuary or the painter and pronounces himself to be the maker of animals and plants²⁷¹.

This text is one that we will have to put with those that show Clement's rigorist attitude toward images. It is curious, however, that he speaks of images in the context, not of the Second Commandment, but of the eighth, against stealing. He

maintains that the artist claims to create animals and plants. What artist ever claimed that? Do we hear behind his words an echo of the Pygmalion story in which Pygmalion's love for a statue he created turned it into a living woman?

Finally, we come to the many passages where Clement denounces art that falsifies reality and influential artists who seduce senseless and passionate men²⁷². He reserves his sharpest remarks for the idolatrous art of Græco-Roman paganism, and in this context, his rigorist attitude seems to have its place. Clement uses the already well-known examples of the Greek philosophers and Jewish polemic against idols, but he makes these remarks, and others, in a context that directly and exclusively aims at Græco-Roman paganism. Faced with the horrors and the obscenities of pagan art, his rigorism attains its greatest intensity. This art is so repugnant to him that he is psychologically incapable of entertaining nuances. In other contexts, on the other hand, when idolatrous and obscene art is not the immediate object of his thoughts, he shows himself more flexible.

Finney, following Butterworth, thinks that it is possible to outline in a consistent way Clement's thinking on images, because "(as it would be for Tertullian). . . his thoughts on the subject of visual arts did not change significantly from one sequence to the next²⁷³." It may be that Clement did not change his ideas over time, but we do not see how we can say that he was consistent in his ideas on the subject. He certainly showed a rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment, even at the price of denying the historicity of the cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant. What advocate of the hostility theory would go that far to support his interpretation? Such an extremism on the part of Clement shows that his rigorism is untenable. His silence about the other Old Testament images is equally troubling when we examine the consequences of his allegorization. The images on the signet rings are evidence that a symbolic, Christian art could and did exist at the beginning of the third century, even if it was only in an embryonic stage.

We are convinced that the passion of Clement's attack against idolatrous and

obscene Græco-Roman art pushed him to an extreme rigorism causing him to affirm positions that it is difficult to defend. At other times, however, in more lucid and dispassionate moments, Clement of Alexandria showed himself capable of accepting what his passion would never have allowed him to accept: symbolic images used by Christians. His overall position is this: a passionate denunciation of pagan art, a denunciation based on a rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment, accompanied by a dispassionate acceptance of symbolic images, purified of pagan idolatry and obscenity, expressing Christian truths. As far as we know, at least from his extant writings, Clement never attempted to reconcile the inherent contradiction of the two positions.

- Origen, *Against Celsus*²⁷⁴ [246]. It is not an accident that the passages from Origen used to support the supposed iconophobia of the ancient Christians sound very much like those used by Clement of Alexandria. This is not surprising since both men shared the same Alexandrian spirituality.

Against Celsus IV, 31. First of all, it appears that Origen did accept a rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment. To defend the Jews Celsus's attacks ("... the Jews were 'fugitives from Egypt, who never performed anything worthy of note, and never were held in any reputation or account'"), Origen answers in the following way:

... if one will examine their polity from its first beginning, and the arrangement of their laws, he will find that they were men who represented upon earth the shadow of a heavenly life, and that amongst them God is recognized as nothing else, save He who is over all things, and that amongst them no maker of images was permitted to enjoy the rights of citizenship. For neither painter nor image-maker existed in their state, the law expelling all such from it; that there might be no pretext for the construction of images,—an art which attracts the attention of foolish men, and which drags down the eyes of the soul from God to earth²⁷⁵.

In another text, Origen distinguishes, somewhat artificially, between idols

(composite creatures, with lions' heads and birds' bodies, for example) and figures (images of real creatures) and then continues saying that . . .

the Word of God, which embraces all things, both damns and rejects these practices [invoking demons]; it forbids the making not only of an idol but also “the figure of all that is on the earth, in the waters, and in the heavens²⁷⁶.”

Origen mentions the two cherubim on the Ark two times without any comment²⁷⁷ and in his Homilies on Numbers does not comment on the episode of the bronze snake. (Nm 21:4–9) Having noted his previous, rigorist declarations, we would like to hear Origen on the images of the Old Testament.

On the other hand, when speaking of the Ark, he shows that artists were not exactly banished from Israel, as he claims in *Against Celsus*:

Order was thus given to all the people. . . to construct an ark so that all the parts form, so to speak, one single ark. . . Women skilled in the art of weaving are also to be found [for the embroidered seraphim] and craftsmen who know how to work in gold, silver, or bronze [the golden cherubim and the bronze snake]. . . ²⁷⁸

If the artists, painters or workers in metal, were condemned and banished on principle, it is somewhat strange that Origen uses the metaphor of a painter to talk about two types of images in man:

Thus, in former times, you carried the earthly image, but now. . . make the “heavenly image” shine in yourselves. Here then is the image of which the Father spoke to the Son: “Let us make man in our image and likeness.” The painter of this image is the Son of God. He is a painter of such quality and power

that his image can be darkened by negligence but not destroyed by malice. The image of God still subsists in you, even though you superimpose the “earthly image” on it. That picture, you are the painter who made it. Has lust tarnished you? It is an earthly color that you are using. Does cupidity burn you? It is another color that you have mixed in. Anger. . . pride. . . impiety: thus for each kind of evil, as a combination of diverse colors, you paint for yourself this earthly image. . . And when he [the Word] has destroyed all these colors taken from the shades of evil, then the “image” that God created shines in you²⁷⁹.

Although he did not do so, Origen could have continued the metaphor and spoken of the colors of goodness that the Son used to paint the heavenly image in the same way he spoke of the colors of evil that we use to paint the earthly image. The fact that he compared the Son of God to a painter seems to suppose that Origen had a somewhat positive, or at least neutral, attitude toward painters and portraits. Is it conceivable that Origen could have compared the Son of God to a prostitute, a thief, a Pharisee, an executioner, a torturer, etc.? This passage appears to soften the iconophobic rigor of the one quoted at the beginning of this section.

It is possible then to interpret the banishment of painters and sculptors mentioned in *Against Celsus* a repudiation of artists who contaminate themselves by making idols. As we have seen with Clement and Philo, Moses’s banishing of artists is a common place of the attack against paganism, and it must be understood as a rhetorical exaggeration of the scope of the Law concerning images to reinforce the attack against pagan adversaries. In the final analysis, the Law did not banish any artist. The Jewish tradition has never understood the Law as an exclusion of artists and has always given them a place, modest though it may be, as well as to works of art permitted by the Law. What is more, in order to accentuate the lack of consistency of this interpretation, God, immediately after promulgating the Law that supposedly banishes artists, inspires Bezalel, Oholiab and their fellow workers to build the ark and its sculpted images. In this passage, is it not obvious that Origen means the artists who, by making idols, drag “down the eyes of the soul from God to earth,” that is, toward idols?

The more we meet this kind of presentation of the Second Commandment in highly polemical contexts, the more we must see it as a figure of rhetoric, an exaggeration, used to make a radical contrast between Judaism and Christianity, on the one hand, and paganism, on the other.

Against Celsus VI, 66. In another section, Celsus says that “those whom one would lead forth out of darkness into the brightness of light, being unable to withstand its splendors, have their power of vision affected and injured, and so imagine that they are smitten with blind ness.” Origen:

In answer to this, we would say that all those indeed sit in darkness, and are rooted in it, who fix their gaze upon the evil handiwork of painters, and molders and sculptors, and who will not look upwards and ascend in thought from all visible and sensible things, to the Creator of all things, who is light; while, on the other hand, everyone is in light who has followed the radiance of the Word who has shown in consequence of what ignorance, and , and want of knowledge of divine things these objects were worshipped instead of God. . . ²⁸⁰

Origen, first of all, censures those who do not rise above the work of art, above the sensual, material object to the Creator and worship him. This is a valid criticism for those who consider what artists produce to be “good works,” just as much as for those who consider them “bad works.” Such a criticism in itself is not surprising coming from Origen, since by his method of allegorization, he tried to go beyond the sensible, historic and visible to attain the spiritual, intellectual and invisible level.

The heart of the problem here is found in the words “the evil handiwork of painters, and molders and sculptors.” What is the meaning of the word “evil” in the sentence? Does it imply that there is “good handiwork of artists . . .,” works that are legitimate if the faithful do not fix their gaze on them but look higher,

rising from the visible to the Creator? Must we understand the distinctions “sensible-spiritual,” “visible-invisible,” “earthly-heavenly,” “literal-symbolic” and “historical-allegorical” as oppositions such that the inferior must be eliminated so as to concentrate exclusively on the superior? The goal of the allegorical method of interpretation is not to destroy the earthly but to use it, to surpass it, to reach beyond it, to the heavenly. One without the other destroys the meaning of both.

Is it unreasonable speculation to wonder if Origen knew about “good handiwork of painters” which illustrated the Old Testament stories of deliverance? R. Greer has drawn our attention to the parallel between the stories of deliverance and Origen’s homilies:

The moral example of the saints, particularly figures from the Old Testament, is a source of strength for the Christian. He finds himself in the place of Ananias, Azarias, and Misael, of Daniel, of Mordecai and Esther, of Judith, and of Jonah. It is remarkable that these stories, which are used homiletically by Origen, also appear in early Christian art. The catacomb frescoes tend to focus upon these Old Testament stories of deliverance. The literary and iconographic evidence belong together²⁸¹.

Whatever the answer might be to this interesting question, the passage noted at the beginning of this section can be interpreted in various ways and is not an obvious proof of Origen’s supposed iconophobia.

Against Celsus VII, 64–66:

Christians refuse to honor the statues of the gods on their altars and in their temples. Basing themselves on scriptural texts, among them the Second Commandment, Christians not only avoid temples, altars, and images, but are

ready to suffer death when it is necessary, rather than debase by any such impiety the conception which they have of the Most High God²⁸².

The context is again the refutation of pagan idolatry represented by the three classical symbols: altars, temples and statues. This passage is similar to that of Minucius Felix who said that Christians had no altars, temples or statues. Their worship was “in spirit and in truth,” but are we to understand Origen to mean that Christians had no sort of altars, temples or images at all, or only that they did not have them as pagans understood them?

In another section, whose context is not that of the fierce fight against paganism but rather a more tranquil context²⁸³, we see that the passage Against Celsus VII, 64–65 must be somewhat nuanced:

But when you see the nations enter the faith, churches built, altars not covered with the blood of animals but consecrated by the “precious blood of Christ,” when you see the priests and the Levites no longer administering the “blood of bulls and goats,” the word of God by the grace of the Holy Spirit, then say that Jesus has taken the place of Moses and that he possesses the princely powers, not of Jesus son of Nun but Jesus Son of God²⁸⁴.

Origen is able to speak of altars and Christian buildings consecrated to worship—otherwise known as “temples.” What is important is not that the words temple, sacrifice altar themselves but, rather, the fact that these words take on a whole other meaning in a non-idolatrous context, such as that of Christian worship. Isolated from other texts, this passage gives the false impression that the Christian liturgy took place out in the open without any material accessories whatsoever. These three words, and the realities they represent, purged of their idolatrous contamination, could be and were used to describe Christianity.

Did Origen know about any images purged of idolatrous contamination being used by Christians? He wrote *Against Celsus* the year 246²⁸⁵, and at that date, the chalices with the image of the Good Shepherd painted on them had existed in North Africa for some time, as well as the images in the baptistry of Dura-Europos, and the catacombs. In the works of Origen that have come down to us, we have no indication that he approved them or even knew about them. At the same time, he does not reject the possibility of a purified Christian art used to express the Gospel. He simply does not deal with the question of a figurative, Christian art.

Against Celsus VIII, 17–19:

And the statues and gifts which are fit offerings to God are the work of no common mechanics [artisans], but are wrought and fashioned in us by the Word of God, to wit, the virtues in which we imitate “the First-born of all creation,” who has set us an example of justice, of temperance, of courage, of wisdom, of piety, and of the other virtues. In all those, then, who plant and cultivate within their souls, according to the divine word, temperance, justice, wisdom, piety, and other virtues, these excellences are their statues they raise. . . And everyone who imitates Him to his ability, does by this very endeavor raise a statue according to the image of the Creator, for in the contemplation of God with a pure heart they become imitators of Him²⁸⁶.

With the usual refusal of the cult of idols, Origen presents his own idea of the ethical image of God in man. What we have already said elsewhere about this subject is valid for Origen: an ethical theology of the image of God does not necessarily exclude the possibility of representing Christ and the saints in painted images.

- Church Orders/Didascalia and Canons [the third Century].

There is a category of ancient documents containing canons, prayers, liturgies, moral precepts, etc. They are called Church Orders. Didascalia provide evidence, according to the advocates of the hostility theory, of an iconophobic attitude on the part of the Christians of the third century and, perhaps, of the beginning of the fourth century. It is difficult to date many of the documents because they include writings of different dates. The fact that they exist in various translations also complicates the problem of dating. After much study and comparison of the documents, specialists have come to the conclusion that they reflect the historical context of the third century, either before or after the persecution of Decius (248–251) ²⁸⁷.

*The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus of Rome*²⁸⁸ (AT). This document is probably from Hippolytus himself around 215 and has, in one way or another, influenced all the ones that have followed. Hippolytus paints a very important picture of the life of the Roman Church at the beginning of the third century. In the second part, “The Laity,” he sets out a list of jobs and professions that are not to be approved; those people who make a living in these areas cannot become catechumens without a change in their professional lives: “If anyone is a sculptor or a painter, let him learn not to make idols. If he will not stop, let him be sent away²⁸⁹.”

*The Didascalia of the Twelve Apostles*²⁹⁰ (DTA). This document exists only in a Syriac translation; the original Greek text has been lost. It is supposed that the DTA was written in Syria.

That it is not right to receive gifts of alms from reprehensible persons.

Do you the bishops and the deacons be constant therefore in the ministry of the altar of Christ—we mean the widows and the orphans. . . But if there be bishops who are careless and give no head to these matters. . . to administer for the nourishment of orphans and widows. . . from painters of pictures or from makers of idols . . . they . . . shall be found guilty in judgment in the day of the Lord. . .

The Ethiopic Didascalia²⁹² (ED). This document is another in the same family of didascalia. It generally reproduces the DTA with some variants.

That the bishop ought to show understanding in receiving offerings from those (only) that are worthy.

The bishop ought to show understanding and make a difference about receiving offerings in cases when it befitteth not. . . Let us keep far from . . . them that make idols²⁹³.

The Octateuch of Clement, the Syriac version²⁹⁴ (OC). This constitution in eight books, piously attributed to Clement of Rome, is one among several anonymous collections written in various ancient languages.

Ordinance that contains the rule . . . about the order of those to be baptized.

A person who lives in debauchery, a drunkard, someone who makes and paints idols, an actor, a driver of horses [in horse races], a wrestler, anyone who goes to wrestling matches, an athlete, anyone who teaches fighting, a public huntsman, a priest or guardian of idols: these are not to be admitted²⁹⁵.

Ecclesiastical canons about those who have recently come to the mystery [of baptism].

I too, Paul, the least of the Apostles, give this command to you, bishops and priests, about the canons: Let the maker of idols, if he comes forward, be ordered to stop or be excluded²⁹⁶.

The Egyptian Didascalia (ED)

If there is a maker of images or a painter (zogaphos), let them be instructed not to make an idol (eidolon), either let them leave off or let them be rejected²⁹⁷.

The Arabic Didascalia (AD)

And if anyone is a maker of idols or a painter, let him be taught not to make idols, and if he be not willing to desist, let him be sent away²⁹⁸.

The Canons of Hippolytus²⁹⁹, canon 11 (CH). We include these canons in our list, even though Coquin dates them to around 340, a date which goes beyond the chronological framework of our study, because they reflect the Apostolic Tradition and other earlier documents.

About anyone who makes idols and images, whether maker or painter.

Every artist, let him learn not to make any image or any idol whatsoever, whether he be a maker, silversmith, or painter, or a worker in any other kind of art. If it happens that, after baptism, any artist makes any such thing, except what people need, let him be cut off until he repents³⁰⁰.

Depending on the context of the different ordinances, we have two general kinds of artists: 1) artists that are already in the Church (ED and CH) and 2) those who want to become Christians (AT and OC). The DTA, AD and DE are not clear as to whether the artists are in the Church already or not. Whatever their relation to the Church, artists who make idols are excluded from communion.

We see, therefore, that the only way to use these texts as evidence for the hostility of ancient Christians toward all figurative art is to use the equation image=idol. The text from the ED clearly shows the distinction between an idol and other images by giving a place in the Church to artists as long as they do not make idols. The AT clearly indicates, and other documents imply, that artists can make other art objects but that the making of idols is excluded. The same conclusion can be drawn from the OC in regards to those artists who want to be baptized. On the one hand, canon 11 seems to reject the making of “any image or any idol whatsoever,” but, on the other, it allows Christian artists to make “things people need.” A certain ambiguity remains, nonetheless.

If we apply to these texts the distinction between idolatrous and non-idolatrous images, we can interpret them quite naturally, without any mental gymnastics: they forbid Christian artists from making idols of two or three dimensions but allow them to exercise their artistic talents in any other way. If, on the other hand, we interpret them in a rigorist sense that excludes the making of any kind of image whatsoever, we have the enormous task of explaining how all this legislation could have had so little impact on the life of the Church, if their purpose was to suppress all art work. We have to have recourse to ideas such as an internal schism between the clergy and the laity, a rupture with the past, a corruption of the tradition, etc.; all these ideas have been put forward to justify the radical reforms of Byzantine iconoclasm and the iconophobia of the 16th-century Reformation.

It seems rather evident, then, that the ancient Christians could distinguish, in theory and in practice, between idolatrous and nonidolatrous images and that the

various didascalia and canons reflect this distinction: Christian artists have their place in the Church as long as they do not pollute themselves by making idols.

- Cyprian of Carthage, *On the Dress of Virgins, An Address to Demetrianus and Letters 2 and 41* [258].

On the Dress of Virgins: Cyprian admonishes virgins, widows and all women who do not live modestly and who deform the work of God by putting on makeup. To change the work of God is the same thing as degrading it, as the devil seeks to do. The bishop of Carthage compares women who put on make up and beautify themselves to a second artist who tries to “correct” the beautiful image made by another painter. The second artist is guilty of dishonoring the image of the first painter. Women who put on makeup offend God and his work, a human being, by immodestly trying to make an already magnificent creature more beautiful.

If any artist, in painting, were to delineate in envious coloring the countenance and likeness and bodily appearance of any one; and the likeness being now painted and completed, another person were to lay hands on it, as if, when it was already formed and already painted, he, being more skilled, could amend it, a serious wrong and a just cause of indignation would seem natural to the former artist. And do you think yourself likely with impunity to commit a boldness of such wicked temerity, and offense to God the artificer [Creator] ³⁰¹?

The fact that Cyprian compared God to a painter and his creature, man, to the artist's work, a portrait, seems to indicate at least a neutral toward this art, on his part, even a positive one. Although he condemns the immodesty of virgins who are too concerned with their appearance, it is difficult to use this passage as evidence for St. Cyprian's supposed hostility toward painters and portraits.

An Address to Demetrianus: Cyprian explains to Demetrianus, the proconsul of Africa, his indignation on hearing that the Christians' refusal to worship the Roman gods is the cause of the terrible things happening to the Roman Empire at that time. He invokes, rather, God's law according to which the world is getting old and weak. Everything is losing strength:

. . . the husbandman is failing in the fields, the sailor at sea, the soldier in the camp, innocence in the market, justice in the tribunal, concord in friendships, skillfulness in the arts, discipline in morals³⁰².

Except for the words "skillfulness in the arts," this passage has nothing to say about artistic activity, artists themselves or images. As an indicator of St. Cyprian's attitude toward non-idolatrous images, the text seems to have no value whatsoever.

Letter 2³⁰³: Euchratius asked Cyprian what he should do about a member of his Church who is an actor (histrion) and professor of theater and who continues to practice and teach his "immodest art." After having expressed his unfavorable opinion on the corruptions associated with the theater of the time, Cyprian suggests that this man stop being an actor and teaching a degrading profession. There is here no question of painters, or art, except in the sense of theatrical art. The point of the attitude of the ancient Christians toward figurative art is completely bypassed.

Letter 41³⁰⁴: In this letter, Cyprian attacks Felicissimus and Augendus because they were trying to foment a schism in the Church. The letter mentions nothing about images, painters or any form of art. We do not know why Koch quoted it as evidence for St. Cyprian's assumed iconophobia.

It is difficult to understand why Koch chose Cyprian as a witness for the hostility

theory. The passages cited above are nearly worthless for the intended purpose. Taking into account Cyprian's importance in the early Church, the advocates of the hostility theory, such as Koch, felt obliged to draw the bishop of Carthage into their camp, at whatever price. The effort failed, and the failure merely points out how far Koch was willing to go to use any reference to art or artists as support for his iconophobic thesis.

- Methodius of Olympus, The Banquet of the Ten Virgins³⁰⁵, From the Discourse on the Resurrection³⁰⁶ [300].

In Koch's list of ancient Christian authors³⁰⁷ who supposedly provide evidence for the iconophobia and aniconia of the primitive Church, we find the name of Methodius of Olympus, a little-known Greek bishop from Lycia, a region in the southwest of Asia Minor, present-day Turkey. In the work of Methodius entitled The Banquet, we read the following:

We have all come into this world, O virgins, endowed with singular beauty, which has a relationship and affinity to divine wisdom. For the souls of men do then most accurately resemble Him who begat and formed them, when, reflecting the unsullied representation of His likeness, and the features of that countenance, to which God looking formed them to have an immortal and indestructible shape, they remain such. For the unbegotten and incorporeal beauty, which neither begins nor is corruptible, but is unchangeable, and grows not old and has need of nothing, He resting in Himself, and in the very light which is in unspeakable and unapproachable places, embracing all things in the circumference of His power, creating and arranging, made the soul after the image of His image. Therefore, also, it is reasonable and immortal. For being made after the image of the Only-begotten, as I said, it has an unsurpassable beauty. . . ³⁰⁸

If, then, anyone will keep this beauty inviolate and unharmed, and such as He who constructed it formed and fashioned it, imitating the eternal and intelligible

nature of which man is the representation and likeness, and will become like a glorious and holy image, he will be transferred thence to heaven, the city of the blessed, and will dwell there as in a sanctuary. ³⁰⁹

Koch chose these two passages to show that Methodius had a “spiritual” idea of the image of God in man. We have seen elsewhere that this notion can be called “the ethical image” because we are conformed to the image of God in us by putting on the virtues of Christ and the saints. There is no reason, however, to conclude that this ethical conception of the image of God in man requires, or necessarily accompanies, a hostility toward artistic images, either in Methodius or in any other author.

Koch not only drew an unjustified conclusion by his equation “ethical image=rejection of painted images” but also read Methodius’s silence on Christian images as a rejection. This conclusion seems to be unacceptable in itself, but by studying Methodius’s language, we are permitted to conclude that he showed a rather favorable attitude toward artistic activity in general. We are not justified, either, in reading his silence as an approval of Christian images, but it is at least strange that he would have used such expressions if he were iconophobic.

We can see no justification in Koch’s conclusion about the second passage: “As we see, it was not the Christian Church but rather the pagan temple that furnished it with its *agalma ieron*[holy image]³¹⁰.”

From the Discourse on the Resurrection

That man, with respect to his nature, is mostly truly said to be neither soul without body, nor, on the other hand, body without soul; but a being composed out of the union of soul and body into one form of the beautiful. . . That there is

a difference between man and other living creatures; and to them are given varieties of natural form and shape, as many as the tangible and visible forces of nature produced at the command of God; while him was given the form and image of God, with every part accurately finished, after the very original likeness of the Father and the only-begotten Son³¹¹.

Once again, this passage shows the “spiritual and immaterial” conception of the image of God in man, but for the question of Christian images, and for the point of view Koch wants to undermine, it seems simply to be irrelevant.

Methodius says that Phidias the statuary [the sculptor], after he had made the Pisæan image of ivory, ordered oil to be poured out before it, that, as far as he could secure it, it might be preserved imperishable³¹².

Koch says the following about this text:

Methodius explains, in his *From the Discourse on the Resurrection*, as Phidias protected his ivory image from corruption by pouring oil on its feet, in the same way God, the *aristotechnas* [the best artist], protected his *agalma logikon* [reasonable image], man, by anointing him with immortality and incorruptibility. . . ³¹³

How does this text witness to Methodius’s iconophobic attitude? Its relevance escapes us.

From the Discourse on the Resurrection, a passage preserved by John of Damascus.

For example, even though the images of the emperor are not all made from gold or silver or precious metals, they are always honored by everyone. Men are not honoring the materials from which they are made; they do not choose to honor one image more than another because it is made from a more valuable substance; they honor the image whether it is made of cement or bronze. If you should mock any of them, you will not be judged differently for mocking plaster or gold; but for showing contempt your king and lord. We make golden images of God's angels, principalities, and powers, to give glory and honor to Him³¹⁴.

John of Damascus quoted this same passage to show that Methodius was favorable to Christian images. Koch thought, rather, that it showed that Methodius did not know of any Christian images; if he had known about them, he would have mentioned them instead of the emperor's image³¹⁵. We once again find ourselves faced with the argument of silence. It is noteworthy all the same that Methodius speaks with respect about an idolatrous image. We must not forget that he is talking about the emperor; he must have had mixed feelings about such images: they were of someone claiming to be a god, yet he felt obliged to honor the emperor. Could he have thought it possible to honor, venerate, in a non-idolatrous manner, an image thought to be that of a god by others? It is not difficult to imagine his attitude standing in front of a Christian emperor. His way of arguing is in fact that of iconodules of all time: the honor or disrespect given to the emperor's image, as to those of any other person worthy of veneration, rebounds to the persons themselves. Methodius indicates as much when he says that "we make. . ." golden images of God's angels in order to give him glory and honor. By using the present tense, he is not simply referring to the Old Testament cherubim but is saying that in his time, around 300, Christians were making golden images of angels for the greater glory of God.

It is amazing that Koch and other advocates of the hostility theory can use Methodius as a witness for a so-called Christian iconophobia. The lack of relevance of these passages leaves us simply perplex as to why Koch chose them. Our perplexity increases when we read the following passage which compares, with much sympathy, God's restoration of the divine image in man to

an artist's restoration of a beautiful, but disfigured, image.

It appears, then, as if an eminent craftsman were to cast over again a noble image, wrought by himself of gold or other material, and beautifully proportioned in all its members, upon his suddenly perceiving that it had been mutilated by some infamous man, who, too envious to endure the image being beautiful, spoiled it. . . For take notice, most wise Aglaophon, that, if the artificer [Creator] wishes that that upon which he has bestowed so much pain and care and labour, shall be quite free from injury, he will be impelled to melt it down, and restore it to its former condition. . . Now God's plan seems to me to have been the same as that which prevails among ourselves. For seeing man, His fairest work, corrupt by envious treachery, He could not endure, with His love for man, to leave him in such a condition, lest he should be forever faulty, and bear the blame to eternity; but dissolved him again into his original materials, in order that, by remodeling, all the blemishes in him might waste away and disappear. For the melting down of the statue in the former case corresponds to the death and dissolution of the body in the latter, and the remolding of the material in the former, to the resurrection after death in the latter. . . ³¹⁶

- Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes and A Treatise on the Anger of God* [between 260? and 317].

In the second book of his *Divine Institutes*, Lactantius exposes the false doctrines of polytheism and supposedly shows himself hostile to figurative art. It is certainly true that he attacks idols and the worship pagans gave to them. In his presentation, however, he is not very original. He uses already well-known arguments from the philosophical, Jewish, and Christian polemic against idols, but he says nothing about our main question: Is it legitimate for Christians to use of non-idolatrous images?

Lactantius ridicules the folly of those who fear gods made by hands while having no fear of the artist who made them. The pagans answered that "we do not fear

the images themselves, but those beings after whose likeness they were formed, and to whose names they are dedicated³¹⁷.” This is a distinction that will be taken up again by the defenders of Christian images at a later time, but with one basic difference: idols are the images of nonexistent, or demonic, beings while Christian icons are images of historical events or persons, either human or angelic.

Lactantius continues his treatise on the subject of portraits and expresses a point of view somewhat surprising if he is iconophobic:

For the plan of making likenesses was invented by men for this reason, that it might be possible to retain the memory of those who had either been removed by death or separated by absence³¹⁸.

He asks if the gods are dead or absent; according to their divine nature, they should be neither dead nor absent, but alive and present everywhere.

For I ask, if any one should often contemplate the likeness of a man who has settled in a foreign land, that he may thus solace himself for him who is absent, would he also appear to be of sound mind, if, when the other had returned and was present, he should persevere in contemplating the likeness, and should prefer the enjoyment of it, rather than the sight of the man himself? Assuredly not. For the likeness of a man appears to be necessary at that time when he is far away; and it will become superfluous when he is at hand. But in the case of God, whose spirit and influence are diffused everywhere, and can never be absent, it is plain that an image is always superfluous³¹⁹.

Two points stand out in this passage. The first is the relatively positive attitude of Lactantius toward portraits of human beings. Since he believed that idolatrous images were in the beginning portraits of human beings that popular piety, with

time, transformed into gods, Lactantius is able to use portraiture, very widespread in the Roman Empire, to reduce the gods to their proper size, that is, dead human beings. Even though he did not mention the existence of Christian portraits, he obviously left the open for such an art? We know that at Lactantius's time, Eusebius informs us, portrait images of the Apostles and of Christ existed. The portrait and statue of the Emperor Constantine, for whose eldest son, Crispus, Lactantius was a tutor, were everywhere. We can very easily imagine that Lactantius would have had no objections to finding himself in front of a portrait image of the emperor, since Constantine in no way claimed to be a god. In such a case, the portrait of an ordinary, undeified man would have presented, and presents, no problem whatsoever. Would Lactantius have been scandalized in seeing a portrait image of Christ, the Apostles or the martyrs? Did he in fact know that such images existed? Unfortunately, we cannot answer these questions on the basis of the writings we possess.

The second point is that Lactantius maintains the Old Testament's and Christianity's prohibition of making a portrait image of God (the Father). Even though he says that a portrait image of God would be "superfluous" because God is everywhere, a somewhat curious argument, Lactantius is right in line with one of the great biblical principles: the impossibility and the prohibition of making a portrait image of God.

At the end of the passage we have been studying, Lactantius designates man as the only true image of God:

But the image of the ever-living God ought to be living and endued with perception. But if it received this name [simulacrum] resemblance [similitudo], can it be supposed that these images resemble God, which have neither perception nor motion? Therefore the image of God is not that which is fashioned by the fingers of men out of stone, or bronze, or other material, but man himself, since he has both perception and motion, and performs many and great actions³²⁰.

In another work, *A Treatise on the Anger of God*, around 314, Lactantius defends the idea that God can just as well be angry against evil as he can love good. What is visible and invisible in man has been by a reason that goes beyond our understanding. To illustrate his point of view, Lactantius again refers to portraits:

If a statue, the resemblance of man, is made by the exercise of design and art, shall we suppose that man himself is made up of fragments which come together at random? And what resemblance to the truth is there in the thing produced, when the greatest and most surpassing skill can imitate nothing more than the mere outline and extreme lineaments of the body? Was the skill of man able to give to his production any motion or sensibility? . . . What artificer [artist] could have fabricated either the heart of man, or the voice, or his very wisdom? Does any man of sound mind, therefore, think that that which man cannot do by reason and judgment, may be accomplished by a meeting together of atoms everywhere adhering to each other³²¹?

Lactantius once again manifests a rather positive attitude toward portraits, but he uses the relation between a real man and his portrait (the full reality and the shadow) in the following argument: a “reason less” portrait of a reason-endowed man presupposes a reason-endowed artist; what is more, since man has reason, he must have been made by a Creator with even more reason than himself. Man was not created by accident. Lactantius does not denigrate portraiture by calling it “the mere outline and extreme lineaments of the body.” He says only what every one already knows: the portrait image of a person is not that person but has a privileged relation to that person. Iconodules of all times should feel very much at home in this passage from Lactantius.

What conclusions can we draw from these texts? 1) Lactantius condemns idols and their worship; 2) he speaks favorably of portraiture; 3) man is the image of God; 4) no one should make a portrait image of God; and 5) the relation “artist-portrait-man” can be used to show the necessity of a Creator God endowed with at least as much reason as man. Where is the hostility toward nonidolatrous

images? If Lactantius is seen to be iconophobic, does not this attribution come from a confusion between a portrait and an idol? The only way Lactantius can be claimed as an ally of the advocates of the hostility theory is by reading him with the preconceived idea that an attack on idols is a manifestation of a refusal of figurative art in general. Even if we accept this last supposition, Lactantius's attitude toward portraits is a stumbling block. On the other hand, all the problems of interpretation evaporate if we read Lactantius in the light of the eminently reasonable distinction between idolatrous and non-idolatrous images.

- Canon 36 of the Council of Elvira [around 300].

*Placuit picturas in ecclesia esse non debere, ne quad colitur et adoratur in parietibus depingatur*³²².

It has seemed good that images should not be in churches so that what is venerated and worshiped not be painted on the walls.

The Council of Elvira in Spain (Granada) met in a period of relative peace, between 295–302 or 306–314. Between these two periods (302–306), the persecution of Diocletian wrought havoc in the Church. The bishops of Elvira issued 81 canons among which we find the famous canon 36. Because this canon deals with images in Christian churches, the very question of our study, it has become the center of great controversy. The problem, of course, is to know how to interpret it; what did it mean to those who issued it, and what does it say about the larger question of the attitude of the ancient Christians toward images? It is not surprising, therefore, that the advocates of an iconophobic tendency see in this canon a confirmation of their point of view. The iconodules, on the hand, are somewhat embarrassed by an open interdiction of images in churches and try to limit its importance, scope and meaning. As we have seen elsewhere, the interpretations of the texts and events of the past are often an expression of positions defended in the present. In general, we can distinguish the attitudes toward canon 36 along the same lines that separate the iconophobes and

iconodules. Even though these predetermined positions are obviously present in the interpretations of all sides—and we cannot and should not try to eliminate them—we can study this text with a critical eye to see what issues are at stake and in which direction it more naturally leans.

We have in the Council of Elvira, one of the first Christian texts of the pre-Constantinian period that shows that the Christians could distinguish between idolatrous and non-idolatrous images. They could distinguish them not only in theory but also in practice, since it is obvious that there would be no images of pagan gods in the churches. In the canon, the word *picturas* (images) clearly means non-idolatrous, figurative representations.

This canon is also evidence that the painting of Christian images was not something new at the beginning of the fourth century. It is somewhat difficult to imagine that one day around the year 300, certain Spanish Christians conceived the completely original idea of painting Christian images on the walls of their churches, as though no one had ever heard of such a practice before. The year 300 is too late a date for a simple recognition of the existence of images in a Christian setting: around 200, the Good Shepherd on chalices in a catholic church in Africa (Tertullian, *On Modesty* X); between 240 and 256, the wall-paintings of Dura-Europos³²³; and from at least 250, the catacomb paintings. In general, ecclesiastical canons, like civil law, especially in the form of prohibitions, are a response to an already existing situation. We can, therefore, suppose that in Spain at the beginning of the fourth century, there already existed churches with painted walls, but for how long? We cannot say.

First of all, we are in the dark as to the subjects of the paintings. According to the canon, the subject was, at least in part, “what is venerated and worshiped.” If we take the words *colitur* *adoratur* synonyms, we should conclude that God the Father, Christ, the Holy Spirit or all three appeared in the wall-paintings, either in symbols or in “portraits.” The meaning of “what is venerated and worshiped” is only one of the problems related to this canon. What the bishops actually prohibited is also a problem: all sorts of subjects or just a limited category of

images? If we knew the answer to this question, it would be much easier to interpret the canon.

Secondly, we do not know what motivated the bishops to issue the canon. What were the conditions in Spain at that time? Were the bishops afraid of profanation by the pagans, during a period of persecution; were they afraid of superstition among Christians? Without knowing the context in which the bishops conceived their decision, we are left without the tools necessary for arriving at a deeper understanding of the canon.

Thirdly, the reference to the walls, in *parietibus*, another factor of ambiguity. Let us suppose that the bishops forbade images of X in churches for reason Y. It seems that the interdiction applies only to the walls of churches. Are we to assume that these same images were permitted in other places, such as homes, in catacombs, in a private chapel, on sarcophagi, as for example the Saragossa³²⁴ sarcophagus? The fact that the bishops mentioned the walls specifically is certainly an intentional restriction of the interdiction.

In his book *Power and Sexuality*, Laeuchli analyzes the 81 canons from the linguistic point of view and concludes that the very linguistic structure of canon 36—only three other canons have a similar form—indicates that the bishops clearly felt ambivalent about prohibiting images in the churches. Laeuchli establishes a linguistic structure containing five elements: 1) the persons condemned; 2) the cause, what the persons did; 3) the justification of the canon, often very emotional sentences that highlight the rectitude of the decision; 4) the authority, in general the word *placuit*, “has seemed good [to us],” that is the bishops in the synod; 5) the decision itself. In the case of canon 36, there is only an authority (4), *placuit*; decision (5), not to do something; and a justification (3). Sections (1) and (2), the persons and the cause, are absent. The absence of an anathema against those who do not conform to the canon adds to what Laeuchli calls the bishops’ ambiguity about the question of images, that is, they are not sure whether they should accept or ban them. Despite his very interesting, linguistic analysis, very much in vogue in our time, Laeuchli sets his new approach within

the context of the old theory:

The ambiguity of can. 36, thus directly reflects the mixed feelings of the clergy toward the matter. As members of the Christian elite, they had to speak against the images; as part of a church that acquiesced more and more in the popular demand for visual, concrete imagery, they were not so sure about the corrupting character of such art. The . . . decision of can. 36 enables us to read that ambivalence between the elite's traditional theological, as well as social, rejection of images and its personal emotional acceptance of them³²⁵.

Canon 36 has its place in a list of 80 other disciplinary, and non-theological, canons. Should we, therefore, identify the motive behind it as merely disciplinary without any theological base? Those of an iconophobic bent tend to see an iconophobic theology based on the Second Commandment behind the canon while iconodules are inclined to restrict the canon's scope to the realm of discipline. Two factors, nonetheless, seem to tip the scales in favor of a limited, disciplinary motive: 1) positively, the canon is part of a series of disciplinary canons, and 2) negatively, we have no indications that the bishops wanted to condemn all kinds of images on the basis of the Second Commandment or anything else. If canon 36 is in fact a disciplinary canon attempting to regulate, but not condemn, a well-established, or even a relatively new, practice, then the Council of Elvira does not deal with the basic question: the legitimacy of Christian images. Another 400 years will have to go by before that question is clearly and directly asked and answered.

We must recognize, however, that for whatever reasons it seemed good to a group of bishops in Spain around the year 300—reasons that we will never really know—to prohibit the painting of certain *picturas* on the walls of the churches. It is fairly obvious that this decision and the reasons that motivated it did not impress the Spanish Christians of subsequent history because they continued to paint images on the walls of Spanish churches. As far as we know, there has never been an iconoclastic controversy in the Spanish Church. We also know that canon 36 was completely ignored in all other Churches until the Reformation of

the 16th century. Even during the Byzantine iconoclastic crisis, the iconoclasts did not quote it in their argumentation. It is quite possible that they did not know about it since few iconoclasts spoke Latin or had many contacts with the West. Due to the great geographic distance between Spain and Byzantium as well as the language barrier, it is not surprising that the iconoclasts never heard of canon 36 of the Council of Elvira.

On the other hand, we cannot really say that the canon was hidden or lost. Several councils of the fourth century adopted certain of Elvira's canons verbatim, but not canon 36. Various canonical collections, however, reproduced it³²⁶; the iconodules did not, therefore, try to conceal it. The canon slept peacefully in these collections, having no great importance, like many other ancient canons that have lost their importance due to a change in the historical setting that gave them birth. It really only entered onto the stage of history at the Protestant Reformation. Even though it had historical existence since the beginning of the fourth century, the canon had no historical importance until the 16th century. Since that time, iconoclasts and iconophobes have used it as a weapon against iconodules, both Catholic and Orthodox.

It is interesting to note that the mildly iconophobic, Frankish Church did not use this canon in its fight against the Seventh Ecumenical Council. It no doubt knew about it, being so close to Spain and Latin-speaking. Then again, since the Frankish Church did not prohibit Church wall-paintings—it in fact encouraged them—this canon was not of much . It could even be seen as an embarrassment to the Frankish Church. In any case, it was never invoked in the West until the Reformation.

But if we feel we have reason to consider canon 36 as an essentially disciplinary canon, the scope of this decision remains very limited in time and space, and very few Protestants of an iconoclastic outlook would feel themselves bound by the decision of the synod of Elvira, if we understand its decision to be an absolute interdiction of all images on church walls. Only the most radical reformers of the 16th century, and their successors, would advocate a total ban

on all figurative art.

To conclude, then, we can say that the Council of Elvira really did forbid picturas be painted on the walls of some Spanish churches, but for reasons that we will probably never know. This interdiction, however, is evidence for a tradition of wall-paintings in Spanish churches, but for how long, we do not know. The vast majority of Christians, however, both iconoclasts and iconodules, have not given this council, or its canon 36, very much importance or authority. Nor have these Christians felt themselves bound to banish all picturas the walls of their churches. As for the attitude of Spanish Christians toward non-idolatrous images at the beginning of the fourth century, canon 36 is so embroiled in ambiguity that it is practically impossible to arrive at any clear and definitive conclusions. That it is an expression of a generalized iconophobia in Spain, and in the whole ancient Church, a repudiation of all figurative art, and a blueprint for an imageless Christianity seems to be a very heavy load, indeed, to put on the back of such a frail, little donkey. If we interpret the canon as a disciplinary decision having to do with a local situation during Diocletian's persecution, then it simply becomes irrelevant when that persecution stopped and a Christian emperor took Diocletian's place. The canon was known to exist, was transmitted in canonical collections, but did not influence subsequent Church history or the development of Spanish Church art. It simply slumbered peacefully until the Protestant Reformation misinterpreted it as a theological rather than a disciplinary canon. From this misreading of the canon stems all the controversy of the centuries following the Reformation.

- Arnobius of Sicca, *The Case Against the Pagans*³²⁷ [around 311].

Arnobius was a rhetor, that is, a teacher of language and speech, from Sicca in Africa and converted to Christianity rather late in life. To prove to the local bishop that he was really sincere, he wrote *The Case Against the Pagans* in six books. The last book targets pagan temples and images.

In the first chapter, Arnobius admits that Christians do not carry on the same religious activities as the pagans:

In this respect, you have a habit of charging us with the highest of impiety, the fact that we erect no temples in which we may discharge the obligation of worship, set up no image or likeness to any god, build no public or private altars, no shrines, offer the blood of no slaughtered beings, no incense or salted meal, or finally, do not bring wine flowing in libations from bowls³²⁸.

This passage recalls those of Minucius Felix and Origen already studied. What we said about them is still valid for Arnobius.

In the ninth chapter, Arnobius notes the pagan reply which has already become classic and which distinguishes between the images of the gods and the gods themselves. This distinction, however, does not lessen the force of Arnobius's attack: "And what greater injustice, disgrace, and hardship can there be than to know a god, on the one hand, and on the other to pray to something else³²⁹?"

Chapter 17 again takes up the objections of the pagans:

"But you err," says he [a pagan], "and you [the Christian] are mistaken, for we do not hold the conviction that bronzes or gold or silver, or any other stuff out of which statues are made, are of themselves gods and sacred deities, but in them we worship and reverence those whom the act of sacred dedication introduces and causes to dwell in the fabricated images . . . [how can] anyone . . . believe that the gods having left behind their normal residence . . . do not shrink from, nor try to evade, entering earthly habitations³³⁰."

Arnobius asks sarcastically if “your gods, then, dwell in plaster and terracotta?”

Chapter 24, the last, has the pagans admit that their ancestors did not know that divinity did not exist in idols, but to calm and control the uneducated, lower classes, these ancestors accepted the worship of idols. If this was really the ancestors’ purpose, says Arnobius in an ironical tone, the worship of idols did not repress anything because “new swarms of evil deeds are begotten by the wickedness of wrongdoers. How does it square to say that the images of the gods were instituted to strike terror into the mob³³¹?”

Even though Arnobius’s treatise made points against paganism and the worship of idols, the chapters we have cited, having been previously cited by Koch in favor of the hostility theory, seem to us to miss the mark. At the end of the sixth book, Arnobius says that “since in the course of the exposition it has been sufficiently shown how futile it is to make images, we must next speak of sacrifices. . . .³³²” In context, we must understand what Arnobius says as meaning that it is futile to make idols, that is, images of false gods. It seems to be an obvious abuse to interpret the passage as condemning, not only idols, but also biblical illustrations and portraits of Old and New Testament personalities. It is not proper to make Arnobius say more than he actually says.

- Eusebius of Cæsarea [260–340].

The terminal period we have set for this study is the life of the Emperor Constantine (280–337), but at what precise date do we close our inquiry: in 306 when he became emperor in the West; in 313 with the Edict of Milan; in 323 when he became ruler of the whole empire; in 325 at the Council of Nicæa; in 330 at the dedication of Constantinople; or in 337 when he died? Since our interest is essentially the period of the pagan empire and the conditions that prevailed during that time, it seems logical to choose the issuing of the Edict of Milan in 313. Despite the necessity of being as precise as possible, our terminal date must remain somewhat open because the pagan empire did not disappear

immediately; nor did the Christian empire suddenly appear. The persecutions, at least, ended as Constantine extended his authority over the whole empire.

In this period of transition, Eusebius of Cæsarea appears as a person of first importance, for many reasons, one of which is his attitude toward Christian images. We think, nonetheless, that he belongs essentially to the Christian empire and, therefore, to the period which began with the of Constantine. His attitude toward images, especially as it may have been expressed in the letter to Constantia, Constantine's sister, concerning the image of Christ, has drawn the attention of many scholars. We will not embark here on such a study of his ideas on images, that will come later³³³. Those who would like to pursue the study of this important bishop and his ideas on Christian images can consult the many studies that specialists have already published³³⁴.

WHO SPEAKS FOR THE CHURCH?

We have argued that Christian art passed through several stages in the course of its historical development: from indirect symbols, signs and images to direct images of historical persons and events. We have also stated that Christian art was a tradition that the Church adopted and adapted to its own needs. Since the adoption and adaptation did not have the same rhythm of development everywhere, it is not surprising to note great differences in style, stages, etc. from one region to another and from one period to another. Whatever was the pace of this development in time and space, the literature of our period took very little notice of it and nowhere do we have any clear and unambiguous statements to the effect that Christians are forbidden to have or make non-idolatrous, figurative art.

By eliminating the restraining force of the hostility theory that claims to show that there was a rupture in continuity, that is, in tradition, our study has hopefully shown that nothing stands in the way of supposing that the artistic development that took place in the post-Constantinian centuries has roots that go far back into

the preConstantinian period. We say “supposing” because the literature and works of art themselves are so fragmentary on the subject of ancient Christian art that we must limit ourselves to suppositions.

It is important to underline that there are two ways of talking about the attitudes of ancient Christians toward art: 1) we can talk about such such an ancient author, or even about a current of opinion, that manifested such and such an attitude toward images, or 2) we can talk about the attitude of the ancient Church toward images. The first of the two ways of approaching the subject is based on scientific research of a particular author’s writings, of the history of his period, and of all other information likely to shed light on the documents and history. This scientific approach tries to determine what a specific author thought. We can even study several authors of a given period to identify a school of thought at the time, for example, the allegorizing tendency of the Alexandrians. It is a whole other research project to determine the mind of the Church, the *mens ecclesiæ*, images. To arrive at a conclusion in this second area of research, it is obvious that we must take into account the results of the first, scientific realm of inquiry, but it is not sufficient to remain there. The mind of the Church is not necessarily determined by a poll. There are other factors that enter into the equation in determining the *mens ecclesiæ*. mind can be expressed in several ways also: by an ecumenical council, by a universality of belief or practice, by one particular Father who by inspiration rises to the occasion and expresses this mind during a crisis, etc. In the first realm of research, specialists try to determine the brute, historical facts of a question or of an author. In the second realm, we try to determine the theological truth on a question that is linked to God’s revelation to man. The criteria for deciding a question are different in the two realms, though they are not mutually exclusive.

We must admit that it is not always easy or even possible to determine the mind of the Church, because the necessary, theological reflection has not yet matured, perhaps because there has not yet been a crisis on the question. It is quite possible that on question X, the Church does not have a fixed opinion, and that only personal opinions and currents of opinion exist. This situation leaves a certain amount of liberty of opinion and expression to everyone. When dealing with a theological question, we want to know who is correctly interpreting the

revelation of God to man, and what is the weight of evidence brought forward by those who claim to express the mind of the Church? this study, we will use the traditional, tripartite structure to evaluate the writings we have studied: 1) theological opinion binding on no one except the person who has it, and even he can change his mind; 2) theologoumena, theological opinions that have risen above the personal and private level to attain a certain credibility due to the theologians or ecclesiastical authorities that support them. These theologoumena respected, or at least acknowledged, currents of opinion; however, they can clash and be in open conflict within the Church. 3) The third level is dogma, orthodoxy, an opinion that has reached the highest level of Church approval, most often during a period of conflict and crisis. It is at this level that the *mens ecclesiae* expressed, that is, the truth of a question in relation to divine revelation.

The advocates of the hostility theory, and iconoclasts in general, claim that the ancient authors they cite and that we have analyzed express not only their own personal opinions, or even a theologoumenon, orthodoxy, that is, true doctrine, the Gospel itself, in relation to images. They also give equal authority to all the witnesses called to testify without any regard for the value of each witness's testimony. The result is, therefore, a potpourri of witnesses: some authors are orthodox but of minor importance, Arnobius and Athenagoras; some authors are orthodox and of major importance, Irenæus, Cyprian and Clement; others are extremists, schismatics and perhaps heterodox, Tertullian and Tatian; one author is of major importance but tainted with heterodoxy, Origen; there are ancient, broadly-based documents which themselves contain material of varying importance, The Apostolic Tradition the Didascalia; finally, we have a local council, Elvira, which, putting aside the question of images, issued bizarre and even perverse rulings. Which voices among these witnesses have the greatest authority? Why give so much authority just to canon 36 of Elvira when the advocates of the hostility theory would never even dream of accepting other canons of Elvira, such as the following:

46: Any faithful who, by abandoning all religious practice, has in fact apostatized, will only be received to communion after a ten-year penance, on the condition that he has not sacrificed to the gods.

49: It is forbidden for Christians to allow Jews to manage their financial or material affairs; it is forbidden for a priest and lay people to do business with Jews. . . ³³⁵

Why should we bow so deeply before the testimony of Clement of Alexandria who, according to some scholars, preached a Christianity “in spirit and in truth” when he repudiated the historical meaning of the Scriptures, for example, concerning the sculpted cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant, because the historical meaning did not agree with his allegorizing method of interpreting the Bible? Even the saints can have doubtful or erroneous opinions. We must, therefore, be discriminating in evaluating the importance of different works, even of the same author.

Did the Church have a mind, a *mens ecclesiae*, nonidolatrous images in the pre-Constantinian period? If yes, who clearly expressed that mind? The iconodules of the mainstream, ecclesiastical Tradition answer “no.” The mind of the Church was not expressed in the pre-Constantinian period. Except in the case of idolatrous images, the Church did not have a mind, precisely because of the nature of a tradition that developed somewhat by accident but which came under Church scrutiny when the tradition was contested. The Church formulated its attitude toward nonidolatrous images, and expressed that attitude, not in the preConstantinian period, but some four centuries later. In the fire of a crisis, during which the iconoclasts openly repudiated the tradition of Christian images, calling icons idols and veneration idolatry, the Church, and not just certain Christians, affirmed the legitimacy of this tradition by appealing to history and theology: to history, by claiming that images were made in the apostolic era; to theology, by stating that since the invisible God became visible in Christ, it is right to paint his earthly image. A tradition with a small “t” became part of holy Tradition with a capital “T”; it has become part of orthodoxy itself. The fact that the question of Christian images was so sharply posed during Byzantine iconoclastic crisis, allowing for no ambiguous thinking, forced the Church to define its mind about figurative art, and to justify on the highest level, the dogmatic level, its centuries-old practice.

A similar, though hypothetical, case could arise if certain Christians contested the correctness of Christian architecture saying that “Christian temples,” that is, buildings exclusively reserved for worship, are a pagan import and a corruption of the Gospel, that only the New Testament model, a house-church, is in conformity with the Gospel. After all, they might say, there is no example of a Christian church in the New Testament. The mainstream of the Christian tradition has, on the other hand, developed a rich theological vision of the church building which expresses in architecture the renewed cosmos of the Kingdom of God. Here is another tradition that is very widely accepted, but which has not been sanctioned on the dogmatic level. If, by chance, this tradition were to be seriously contested, we are certain that it would receive a dogmatic definition.

Our pre-Constantinian period was not a period in which Christians felt obligated to express themselves on the question of Christian images, except in the case of the Council of Elvira. Passing references may have been made here and there, but the fundamental question was, as far as we know, never raised. At least the literature does not reflect such a preoccupation if there was one. The monuments that have come down to us, however, show that Christians were in the process of laying the foundations of a rich artistic tradition, and this foundation-laying does not seem to have drawn attention or provoked any major reactions. Iconoclasts and advocates of the hostility theory are wrong when they interpret the ancient Christian attack on idols and the silence of these same ancient Christians regarding non-idolatrous figurative art as an expression of the mind of the Church regarding Christian art.

CONCLUSION.

After our own study, we feel obliged to accept the conclusion of Bevan:

In spite, however, of these approximations in early Christian writers to the

Jewish view [sic], it remains, I think, true that there is no clear statement in any early Christian writing to the effect that it is definitely wrong to make the representations of a living creature, or of a human being, even when there is no question of worshipping it³³⁶.

What we have claimed is this: behind and underneath the attack on idols carried out by all the witnesses cited, there exist several indications—from Tertullian, 200, (the Good Shepherd on chalices) up to the Council of Elvira, 300, (the pictures on the walls) and Methodius, 300, (the golden angels)—to the effect that Christians were using figurative art, without feeling in danger of being polluted by idolatry. No author or document condemns Christian art; and no one, with the possible exception of the Council of Elvira, even dealt with the subject directly and openly. Some authors express a rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment, making exaggerated statements about the Law and the scope of the Second mandment, and then are forced to backpedal when they realize that the Old Testament itself contradicts their theory. These same authors testify to the existence of a category of nonidolatrous Christian images. We have other indications that the roots of Christian imagery may go back much farther. This time, the evidence comes from contaminated sources, the Acts of John, Carpocratians in the writings of Irenæus and the chapel of a syncretistic emperor. And, finally, we have the traditions-legends that place Christian images in the apostolic era itself.

If, as Bevan says, there is “no clear statement” in ancient Christian literature to the effect that it is forbidden for Christians to paint animate beings, including human beings, how can we continue to claim that the ancient Christian Church was hostile to images without designating the kind of images being discussed? It is a lack of methodological rigor to maintain old, out-dated opinions that archeology principally, but also the writings themselves, do not support, opinions that accuse the ancient Christians of being aniconic and iconophobic.

3.5 The Archeological Monuments.

INTRODUCTION.

This section will be considerably shorter than the preceding one on Christian literature, first of all, because there are relatively few archeological monuments of the pre-Constantinian period and because they are not as accessible as the writings of the period. But the main reason is the fact that the hostility theory is supposedly supported by the literary tradition but ignores the monuments that archeology has brought to light. Works of art more easily open themselves to the emotional, esthetic and mystical dimensions of man than does literature. The goal of this section is not simply to describe the artistic monuments of ancient Christianity; art historians have already accomplished that task in numerous, available studies³³⁷. Our goal here is limited to an interpretative study of the very existence of these monuments. It is the existence of Christian images, whatever their subject, that is the source of the problem for the advocates of the hostility theory. If their theory is true, the ancient Christians should not have done what archeology shows that they did, that is, produce non-idolatrous images.

THE INVENTORY.

It is sufficient here to enumerate the kinds of works that have come down to us on which images are found³³⁸.

Paintings: mainly those of the Roman catacombs³³⁹ and the housechurch at Dura-Europos³⁴⁰.

1) Sculptures: statues³⁴¹ and bas-relief on sarcophagi³⁴². Golden glasses³⁴³.

2) Lamps³⁴⁴.

3) Cut gems³⁴⁵.

THE RELATION OF THE MONUMENTS TO THE LITERATURE.

The advocates of the hostility theory, Dobschutz, Koch, Elliger, Klauser et al., supposed that the literary and the archeological witness were in conflict. They claimed that archeology showed a favorable attitude to images while the literature showed a hostile attitude. Naturally, according to them, the literary witness represented a pure and rigorist Christianity, and the archeology represented a corruption sliding toward paganism. It is noteworthy that these theoreticians, coming from a Protestant and iconophobic tradition, give more credit to the word, to texts, to an intellectualization than to the artistic testimony which escapes the control of the mind and, thus, opens itself to the deeper levels of the human psyche. A more recent work by Sabine Schrenk³⁴⁶, though not necessarily advocating the hostility theory, does advocate separating monuments from literature. The works of Christian art that have come down to us from Late Antiquity do not reflect the pervasive typological interpretation that is found in patristic texts. Typological art is a medieval phenomenon. Such works must be interpreted on their own and not compared to literature.

We maintain, however, that the two orders of ancient Christian evidence, literary and archeological, must be read together if we hope to understand better the phenomenon which produced them, that is, the Christianity of the first three centuries. This is the point of view we want to defend in this study, a point of view that is being adopted by a growing number of scholars. There is no valid reason, except the preconceived hostility theory and the denigration of art in favor of the word, to oppose these two orders of testimony. In the same way, there is no justification to oppose the intellectual writings, such as the apologies and attacks on heresies, etc., to liturgical texts and prayers which have been preserved from the ancient Christian period. By putting the various orders of

testimony together, we see more clearly that ancient Christianity was a movement that expressed itself on various levels and by various means.

THE CHRONOLOGY.

The dating of artistic monuments from the ancient Christian period, especially the catacomb paintings, is one of the major problems facing scholars. The more we push back the dating of the first Christian images toward the apostolic era, the more difficult it is for the advocates of the hostility theory to claim that “pure Christianity” is and was aniconic and iconophobic. Here again we see open up before us the gulf separating the pro- and anti-image scholars especially in trying to date the catacomb paintings. De Rossi and Wilpert dated some paintings to the first century; Styger and Wirth chose the third century³⁴⁷. It is obviously more difficult to determine the attitudes of ancient Christians toward non-idolatrous images if no such images from their time exist. As images dating with certainty to the first and second centuries is a problem for the advocates of the iconophobic tradition, the absence of images from these centuries also requires an explanation from advocates of the iconodule tradition. This is not an insurmountable problem, however, since we have said that Christian art is a tradition adopted unequally in time and space. It is less imperative for the iconodules to explain the silence than it is for the iconophobes to explain the monuments that contradict their basic theory.

The problem of dating is, therefore, obvious. The same criteria of dating are not accepted by all, thus another problem: which method to use? There are two general orientations used to date the monuments: 1) dating catacomb images by comparing their styles to Roman paintings of the same era; 2) dating the catacombs themselves and the structures that surround them. The paintings, thus, have the same dates as the catacombs regardless of the similarities or differences of style. Both methods have strong and weak points. If we look at all the literature on the question of chronology, we have to come to the conclusion that there is no reliable and acceptable chronology of the catacomb paintings; there is no method that is acceptable and recognized by all scholars in the field. Our

study is, therefore, greatly handicapped by the absence of sure and recognized dates for the catacomb paintings.

The paintings of the house-church of Dura-Europos do not pose a problem of dating. Kraeling has determined that the Christians of Dura painted their images between 240 and 256. The first date is indicated by a date mark left by the artist on the wall, and the second is the date of the destruction of the city by the Persians³⁴⁸.

For the dating of the sarcophagi, the problem is also less acute. Since sarcophagi were luxury items, it is not surprising that they do not go much farther back than the first half of the third century. Few Christians of the first two centuries had great financial resources or social standing, and so few could afford, or even wanted, such a symbol of prestige as a sculpted sarcophagus.

THE STAGES OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN ART.

The Tradition of the Church recognizes that literary symbols, prefigurations and allegories of Christ from the Old Testament preceded his coming in the flesh in the Incarnation. Canon 82 of the Quinisext Council in 692 stipulates that Christ should, from that time on, be painted in his personal, historical image and no longer as a lamb, as one of “the ancient types and shadows as symbols of the truth³⁴⁹.” This canon shows us how the mainstream Tradition relates indirect symbols and direct images. Symbols make us think of Christ but are not direct images of his person: the Good Shepherd, the lamb, the XP, the cross, the philosopher, etc. In canon 82, the Church showed a preference for direct images of the historical Christ, in other words, portrait icons. Even though canon 82 does not specifically speak of ancient Christian art, it can help us see that Christian images developed in the same way: from indirect symbols to direct images of persons and events.

Since the ancient Christians were part of an illegal religion in the Roman Empire, they naturally chose figurations, symbolic images and signs that would not attract the attention of their pagan neighbors. The literary and archeological evidence leaves the door open to the possibility that the first Christians expressed their faith in artistic representations. The Jews of the first century, and subsequent centuries, did the same. Neither the Jews nor the Christians believed they were breaking the Second Commandment by making and using these images because the images the two groups produced did not expose them to the dangers of idolatry. The images were used in a liturgical context where there was no question of worshipping them.

The Christians first chose the images common to the biblical tradition and the pagan culture, or only images that were known to the surrounding culture but filled them with a Christian meaning. In either case, the symbolic images did not attract the attention of the authorities³⁵⁰. Bruun gives a list of these images: agnus, ancora, asinus, calix, caput velatum, columba, corona, crux, delphinus, dolium, flagellum, folium, genius, libra, loulab, modify, navis, nimbus, olea, orans, palma, pampinus, panis, pastor bonus, pharos, phœnix, piscis, ramus olex, serpens, tabella, tridens, vas, vitis, uvæ. Finney designates these images and others as proto-Christian or even crypto-Christian³⁵¹. We may have here one of the causes of the dating problem: we cannot distinguish between pagan, symbolic images and crypto-Christian ones.

To continue the development of Christian art, we know that at a certain time, we do not know where or when, Christians began to produce images clearly inspired by the Old Testament. Did this happen at different times and different places, or did one center, like Rome or Antioch, start the practice, with smaller communities following the lead? We unfortunately do not know. By beginning to illustrate certain stories of the Old Testament, they were moving out of the purely symbolic realm into that of representing historical scenes and, therefore, historical persons in a direct and nonsymbolic way. They no doubt continued to use symbols also. Even the historical scenes could be symbolic on another. Thirdly, scenes from the New Testament appeared. These images were not essentially different from Old Testament images, except they showed Gospel events and people directly. Scenes of Christ's baptism were also included,

showing that they did not hesitate to paint images of Christ himself. So even in the ancient, pre-Constantinian period, we have the essential principle that underlies images, called icons, of Christ and the saints in subsequent centuries: the ancient Christians did not hesitate to paint a direct image of Christ. The Christians continued to use symbolic, biblical and non-biblical images as well as scenes from the two Testaments. The fourth stage, in which Christ or the saints were represented without any historical setting, facing the observer, is generally beyond the time frame of our study even though Eusebius says that he had seen such portraits at the beginning of the fourth century. The last stage is determined by canon 82 of the Quinisext Council (692) by which the Church expressed its preference for direct, portrait images of the historical Christ over indirect, symbolic images, such as the lamb.

The main lines of Church Tradition and Nicæa II's defense of icons is confirmed: from a very early period, perhaps, from the Apostles themselves, Christians used the word and image to preach the Gospel.

“CONTAMINATED” SOURCES.

Is it important, as some literary sources indicate, that images of Christ or of other New Testament persons were found in a pagan, syncretistic or heretical context? The Emperor Severus Alexander (222–235), well known for his religious syncretism, had the images of Christ, Abraham, Orpheus and other illustrious persons in his chapel where he prayed every morning³⁵². Irenæus indicates that the heretical Carpocratians also had images of Christ. Let us suppose that these literary witnesses are historical; should we be concerned, as say the advocates of the hostility theory, that Christian images entered into the Church from contaminated sources showing that images, and their veneration, had no place in “pure” Christianity? Not necessarily.

We have already seen that there were several stages of the development of Christian art, and it would not be striking that pagan syncretists or heretics were

ahead of Christians at one or another stage of the development. By comparing the number of images, their quality and their diversity in the synagogue and in the house-church at Dura-Europos, we have the impression that the Jews were ahead of the Christians in developing a liturgical art. It is also quite possible that different regions and social classes advanced more or less rapidly than others. Since regional styles differed quite markedly for all sorts of reasons, why could not the movement from one stage to another be quite different from region to region and class to class?

Should we be worried about the possibility that orthodox Christians could have been influenced by pagans' and heretics' practices in the realm of art? Here again, not necessarily. There is nothing new or surprising in the fact that Christians borrowed from pagan sources to enrich some aspect of their community life. Many examples of this kind of borrowing already exist. The current of scholarly opinion that has tried to isolate Christianity from all outside influences of Græco-Roman culture does not have much credibility anymore. Even if we could prove that Gnostic heretics had a direct influence on Christian art, and this is still only a hypothesis, this fact in itself is no more disquieting than other borrowings made from pagans or the Jews. The important question here, as with the Hebrews' borrowing of creation stories from the available literature in the ancient Middle East, is not that borrowings took place but to what extent did Christians, as with the Hebrews, change and reinterpret what was coming from the exterior. How did they purify images, forms and symbols and adapt them to their own needs by first changing the inner meaning of the symbols and images, and then changing the forms themselves.

THE JEWISH CHRISTIANS.

According to Meyers and Strange³⁵³, there is no consensus about the Jewish Christian identity of the monuments discovered by Bagatti and others. This problem is very important for our study because of the monuments on which images, signs and symbols are found and which may go back to the apostolic era. At the present stage of our knowledge, a resolution of this problem does not

seem imminent. The pro's and the con's continue to argue, but the monuments remain. The possibility, however, that Jewish Christians of the first or second centuries produced these artistic monuments is heavy with consequences for the question of the ancient Christians' attitude toward images. The discovery of these monuments, and at least the possibility that they might be of Jewish Christian origin, should at least make us more prudent. As has already happened in the past, new archeological or literary discoveries may make today's categorical statements about what was and was not true in the past look not only exaggerated but ridiculous.

Notes

155. Ibid.

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CHAPTER 4

EUSEBIUS OF CÆSAREA AND CHRISTIAN IMAGES

4.1 Introduction.

In this chapter, we would like to continue the analytical work begun in the previous ones, where we examined the writings and archeology of Jews and Christians during the first three centuries of Christian history to determine their attitudes toward non-idolatrous images. We chose the year 313 as the terminus ad quem it was at that date that Constantine assumed authority in the Western Roman Empire, thus, inaugurating what history has come to call the Christian Empire.

Eusebius of Cæsarea (270–340) is certainly an important figure at this turning point in the history of the world and the Church. His literary work, to say nothing of his historical role in the theological controversies of the time, is considerable. Everyone is agreed in applauding his contribution to Church historiography. There are, on the other hand, divergent opinions about his theology and his place in the Church. Since Eusebius favored Arius and opposed the Council of Nicæa in 325, as well as Athanasius of Alexandria, his name has been tainted with heresy. Many consider Eusebius to have been an iconophobe as well as an Arian. Although the historicity of this characterization, iconophobia, is considered to be well founded, we would like to examine this dominant opinion to see if it is in fact grounded in the historical evidence.

The witness of Eusebius is all the more important because it furnishes us with precious information about Christian, and other, images that at his time. Due to this data, and especially due to the various interpretations that have been made of it, Eusebius has an undeniably important place in the unending disputes about early Christian art. We propose studying his writings to see what they tell us about the place of figurative art in the Church at the end of the third and the beginning of the fourth centuries. In the light of this data, we will be better able to determine what Eusebius thought of Christian art. By studying his writings, we want to answer two general questions: 1) What data does Eusebius provide about existing Christian images in his time? and 2) What was his attitude toward them?

Let us look, first of all, at the chronology of Eusebius's works in which he refers

to images. What follows is only relative since specialists in the field cannot themselves agree on a definite chronology. We have, therefore, accepted the dating established by Wallace-Hadri¹¹³⁵⁴:

1. before 303 The History of the Church, I—VII

2. after 309 Commentary on Luke

3. before 313 The Proof of the Gospel

4. after 318 The History of the Church, I—IX

5. 313–324 Letter to Constantia

6. 337 The Life of Constantine

4.2 At Paneas, the Statue of Christ and the Woman with a Hemorrhage: The History of the Church VII, XVIII³⁵⁵.

In this first text (see the annex of this chapter), Eusebius informs us of the existence of two sorts of Christian images: 1) at Paneas, a bronze work composed of two statues, one said to be of Christ and the other of the woman with a hemorrhage; 2) colored portraits of the Apostles Peter and Paul, and Christ. The local tradition at Paneas claimed that the statue reproduced the real features of Christ, but Eusebius does not seem to be convinced: “This statue, which was said resemble the features of Jesus. . .” For portraits, however, he gives the impression of believing in the truth of the claim: “It is not at all surprising that Gentiles . . . should have expressed their gratitude thus, for the features of His Apostles Paul and Peter, and indeed of Christ Himself, have been preserved in colored portraits which I have examined.” It is significant that Eusebius does not exclude the possibility of real portraits of Christ and the Apostles. Does not such a belief suppose, at least in Eusebius’s mind, a series of portraits that go very far back in history, if not to apostolic times? How could there be a realistic portrait of a person, some 250 years later, without a model having been made while that person was alive? Of course, Eusebius’s opinion, in itself, proves nothing about the historicity of a chain of portraits representing Christ and the Apostles. Such an opinion, however, would show that Eusebius did not think that possibility absurd, impossible or impious.

Eusebius manifests a favorable attitude toward these images: he notes the following about this little chapter: “I do not think I ought to omit a story that deserves to be remembered by those who will follow us.” In addition, he says that the statues were “. . . a wonderful memorial of the benefit the Savior conferred upon her. . .” and “It is not at all surprising that Gentiles. . . should have expressed their gratitude thus. . .” Even if the woman with a hemorrhage in the Gospel story did not really set up the statues, it does not seem inconceivable to Eusebius that she could have done such a thing. Does Eusebius seem to be scandalized by the very existence of the statues or by the fact that some claim that the woman with a hemorrhage set them up? Apparently not. Does he attack them as a violation of the Second Commandment? No. The tone of the whole

chapter shows rather his admiration of the woman's thank-offering. As for the portraits, he does not show any antipathy toward them. This is all the more significant because, as we will see later with regards to the portraits of Christ and Paul, Eusebius manifests a strong hostility toward such images—if, indeed, the letter is authentic as we have it. Since this first text is part of Eusebius's unquestionably authentic writings, we must give it great weight in evaluating his attitude toward Christian images. his *On the Divine Images*³⁵⁶, St. John of Damascus refers to this Eusebian text as a statement in favor of Christian images. He certainly would not have quoted such a text if he had detected in it the slightest antagonism toward images. The eighth century iconoclasts themselves did not understand the story of the statues as a hostile expression toward Christian images. Had they detected the slightest antagonism, they would certainly have cited it as a confirmation of Eusebius's, and the early Church's, supposed iconophobia. For St. John, Eusebius was an iconodule, or at least not opposed to Christian images, despite his reputation for other doctrinal deviations.

Certain modern scholars³⁵⁷ believe they have detected a negative attitude on Eusebius's part when he speaks about the pagan custom of honoring benefactors by erecting commemorative statues. They understand the description of the woman's gesture, a "Gentile custom," as a condemnation of her action. Such a pejorative interpretation is certainly in conflict with the beginning of the passage where Eusebius says that the "story deserves to be remembered by those who will follow us." If there is any ambiguity in the last sentence of the chapter, it must be interpreted in the light of the opening sentence in which the meaning is clear. What seems normal, that is, "not at all surprising," to Eusebius is not the continuation of an abominable and idolatrous custom in the Church, but rather that the former pagans would have purified one of their customs of idolatry and used it to honor the Savior.

On the basis of this text alone, it is difficult to claim that Eusebius of Cæsarea was iconophobic, and since *The History of the Church* the first of his works, around 303, to speak of Christian images, it is rather a witness to his iconodulia—at least neutrality—instead of to his iconophobia.

If, in fact, the monument at Paneas was an image of the healer god, Æ, and an unknown suppliant³⁵⁸, we have a good example of a well-known process: Christians emptied a pagan, artistic form of its content and filled it with a Christian meaning. They adopted and adapted elements of pagan imagery to their own needs. If Eusebius himself was aware of the Christianization of a pagan monument, or even if he suspected, he says nothing concrete to indicate this awareness. The only thing he says in this regard is that the statue “was said” to resemble Christ.

4.3 At paneas, the Statue of Christ and the Woman with a Hemorrhage: Commentary on Luke 8:43–48³⁵⁹.

As we can see, this text is nearly identical to the preceding one in what it says about the woman with a hemorrhage. The Commentary from the History that there is a problem of authenticity surrounding the former writing. It is, in fact, unlikely that the Commentary, we have it, comes from Eusebius. The third-from-the-last line, at least, is certainly not Eusebian: according to the historian Sozomen³⁶⁰, the Emperor Julian (361–363) destroyed the bronze monument. According to the Commentary, Maximin Daia (308–313) destroyed it. Such gross historical error cannot be attributed to Eusebius. Whatever we want to say about the authenticity of the Commentary, our argument is unaffected since the Commentary brings to the fore no new information. If Eusebius is not the author of the Commentary, his History of the Church is quite sufficient to support our thesis. If he is the author, we simply have a restatement of the testimony already established.

4.4 The Image of the Three Visitors to Abraham: the proof of the Gospel V, 9³⁶¹.

We learn from this passage about the existence of an image at the place, the Oak of Mamre, where Abraham received three mysterious visitors. (The Orthodox iconographic tradition calls this image the Hospitality of Abraham.) this image, the three visitors “sit one on each side, and he in the midst surpasses them in honor.” The content of the image, the , is both historical and symbolic: historical because the biblical text, as well as its traditional interpretation, sees in it the story of a real, historical event. As such, the image is the illustration of a biblical story, but it is also symbolic because, for Eusebius, one of the visitors is/represents Christ. In the tradition of the Church, the event and the image of the Hospitality of Abraham also have a symbolic interpretation, both Christological and Trinitarian. The more ancient tradition sees in the event a prefiguration of Christ, accompanied by two angels; the other tradition, later, sees three angels symbolically representing the Trinity. The two interpretations, how ever, do not necessarily exclude each other³⁶². Eusebius says nothing about the age of the image and expresses no opinion on the matter.

In this passage of The Proof, gives his interpretation of Gn 18:19–25 according to which the words that Abraham addresses to one of the three visitors can only be spoken to the Lord himself, Christ, in a human form that prefigures the Incarnation. Eusebius refers to the image in passing, simply as a visual illustration of his exegesis. He shows a positive attitude toward the image or, at least, does not say anything negative. There is not the slightest hint of hostility toward images in general or toward this one in particular. What is more, St. John of Damascus included this passage among the patristic texts in favor of iconodulia, the second Eusebian text cited by St. John in favor of Christian images. St. John’s opinion of Eusebius on this question is quite clear. The authenticity of the text is not a problem here.

4.5 The Cross in the Hand of a Statue of Constantine: the History of the Church IX, IX, 10³⁶³.

In this passage, Eusebius deals with a cross and a statue of the Emperor Constantine, both three-dimensional. We obviously do not need this passage to establish the existence of imperial statues, but the association of the emperor's statue with the image of the cross, as a symbol of victory, is quite new. At the time, it was no doubt very striking, for Christians and for pagans, to see a cross intimately with the emperor's image. We do not know to what degree Christians were accustomed before this event to seeing a cross in public, but the gesture of Constantine certainly gave a new visibility and legitimacy to this image of torture transformed into a symbol of military and political victory.

Eusebius's attitude toward the statues of pagan Roman emperors is not pertinent to our study. These statues were considered to be idols, and it is not difficult to imagine his attitude. It is important to determine, however, his attitude toward the statue of a "Christian" emperor. What should one do with a "de-idolized" statue of a "de-deified" emperor? Our text says nothing on the matter. Eusebius, however, tells the story as though it is a manifestation of Constantine's Christian piety. For him, the two images put together, eloquently but silently, proclaim the victory of the Christian empire over the pagan empire. If Eusebius felt ill at ease in front of a publicly exposed cross, in front of the new type of imperial statue—unchanged in appearance but revolutionary in meaning—or in front of the two put together in one monument, his text gives no hint of his feeling. And finally, St. John quotes this chapter, the third Eusebian text, as another piece of evidence supporting the Christian iconographic tradition. The authenticity of the writing is not in question.

The emperor's statue furnishes us with an example of the flexibility of the Christian attitude toward two types of images. According to Pliny the Younger and other authors, Christians refused to sacrifice to the statue of the emperor³⁶⁴ Since the Roman civil religion raised the emperor to the rank of a god, his statue was an idol. Eusebius no doubt shared this point of view, but when the emperor refused divine honors and declared himself human, his statue lost its idolatrous quality. For Eusebius, and for all Christians, a cross in the hand of a statue of Diocletian, for example, would probably have been shocking and impious, but a cross in the hand of a statue of Constantine, the 13th Apostle, was a symbol of

victory and glory. Eusebius's attitude, and that of Christians in general, toward an image depended on the nature of that image, whether it was idolatrous or not.

Up to this point in our study, based on authentic texts, Eusebius has not shown the slightest iconophobia. The fact that he noted the existence of this non-idolatrous image is a proof in itself of his approval of an art purified of idolatry. The fact that St. John of Damascus cites Eusebius three times shows that he considered the bishop of Cæsarea to be in the iconodule camp.

4.6 A Cross in the Hand of a Statue of Constantine and its Inscription: the Life of Constantine I, XI³⁶⁵

Since we are dealing for the first time with *The Life of Constantine*, need to touch on the problem of this document's authenticity. Controversy has been raging for a long time^{366,13} and the question of the *Life's* authenticity is obviously capital since we want to use it as evidence for Eusebius's attitude toward images. Unfortunately, there is no consensus on the question. At the same time, one common position seems to be emerging: Eusebius is the author of the core of a document composed right after Constantine's death in 337. Subsequent authors probably added other sections and rewrote some parts. After a review of representative authors on the question of the *Life's* authenticity, we note that the sections that refer to images are not among the contested passages. At the beginning of the *Life*, Eusebius states his intention: "the design of my present undertaking being to speak and write of those circumstances only which have reference to his religious character³⁶⁷." The parts that interest us specifically deal with Constantine's piety and, therefore, are part of the Eusebian core. If, on the other hand, future scholars prove the opposite, the conclusions of this study will not be affected because the same passage is contained in *The History*.

The Life of Constantine, in or after 337, claims to set out historical events that took place between 313 and 337: the first being the date when Constantine came to power in the West and, the second, the date of his death. The Eusebian core expresses Eusebius's attitude at the end of his life, in 340. We, therefore, feel it is possible to search the Eusebian core for historical data concerning images that existed at the beginning of the fourth century as well as for evidence of Eusebius's attitude toward nonidolatrous, figurative art.

Since this passage of the *Life* essentially the same information contained in *The History*, reader can refer to the comments we made on this material. See 4.4 above.

4.7 Rejection of Christ's Image: the letter to Constantia³⁶⁸.

The foundation of Eusebius's iconophobic reputation is based solely on a letter he supposedly wrote to Constantia, Constantine's half-sister, in answer to her request that Eusebius send her an image of Christ. Eusebius refused and castigated the empress for having dared to ask for such a thing. No other Eusebian writing or gesture is cited to support his supposed iconophobia. His anti-image reputation depends entirely on the authenticity of this letter. If Eusebius did not write the letter at the beginning of the fourth and if it is rather a fabrication of eighth-century iconoclasts, the idea of Eusebius's hostility toward Christian images has no foundation whatsoever. If Eusebius's iconophobia falls with the letter's authenticity, a major element of a widely spread "rumor" falls with it: the claim that the Christians of the first three centuries were hostile toward non-idolatrous images.

This letter is unknown before the iconoclastic council of Hieria in 754; it was first quoted in that council. The letter thus makes its entry onto the historical stage some 400 years after its presumed composition³⁶⁹. The Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787 refuted the decree of Hieria and reproduced two sections of the letter. Since the eighth century, everyone, iconophobes and iconodules, has put the bishop of Cæsarea in the camp of those who have been hostile to Christian images. We have already noted, however, the opposite opinion of St. John of Damascus about Eusebius. As a result, iconophobes after the eighth century have considered Eusebius to be an ally. The following is a reconstitution of the letter's historical transmission³⁷⁰:

313–325 Eusebius supposedly wrote the letter.

325–754 The letter was transmitted in collections of Eusebius's writings without, however, creating an echo in any other writing.

754 The iconoclastic council of Hieria quoted the letter in defense of its position against icons.

787 Nicæa II quoted two sections of the letter in its refutation of Hieria.

818–820 Patriarch Nicephorus I of Constantinople quoted other fragments in his *Contra Eusebium et Epiphanidem* and *Refutatio et Eversio*.

1702 F. Boivin assembled the sections in a note added to an edition of *Byzantina Historia* Nicephorus Gregoras, a Greek scholar of the fourth century.

1830 L. Schopen reproduced Boivin's text in a new edition of *Byzantina Historia*.

1852 J. Pitra reproduced the letter in *Spicilegium Solesmense* .

1860 J. Migne published Boivin's compilation.

1968 H. Geischer included the letter in *Der byzantinische Bilderstreit*.

1969 H. Hennephof reproduced the letter in *Textus byzantinos ad iconomachiam pertinentes*.

1972 Cyril Mango published an English translation.

The authenticity of the letter is the problem. S. Gero claims that the letter as we have it is not complete; some sections are missing. The text begins, “You also wrote me about an image of Christ. . .” This could imply that other things were discussed in the letter³⁷¹. Since the letter was not included in any of the recognized collections of Eusebius’s works and since the eighth-century iconoclasts were the first to quote it, in a context of controversy, in support of their position, a shadow hangs over its historicity and, thus, over Eusebius’s iconophobic reputation. Is the letter a pure fabrication of the iconoclasts? Is it the work of several authors, of another Eusebius? Did the iconoclasts embellish an authentic text for their own polemical purposes, a text that was less iconophobic than the text we have now, or not at all iconophobic? Is there any other document comparable to this text in patristic literature: a document that, being unknown for 400 years, is brought to light for the first time in a bloody controversy, a document whose implications are so far-reaching and which reverses the previously accepted opinion based on unquestionably authentic documents? If we reject the Letter to Constantia on grounds of inauthenticity or doubtful authenticity, it is difficult to maintain Eusebius’s iconophobic reputation on the basis of his authentic writings.

We must acknowledge that the Fathers of Nicæa II did not ask the question of authenticity even though they questioned other writings that the iconoclasts used to defend their position. They rejected the letter on the grounds of Eusebius’s Arianism, a decidedly weaker argument than inauthenticity. Nicephorus, Patriarch of Constantinople from 806 to 815, in his *Contra Eusebium et Epiphaniem* the authenticity of the letter while rejecting a letter supposedly written by Epiphanius of Cyprus.

Despite the doubts, there also exist arguments in favor of the letter’s historicity. At the present time, it is probably impossible to prove to ‘s satisfaction either the authenticity or the inauthenticity of the letter. S. Gero makes a case for its authenticity from the point of view of style, vocabulary, theological context, etc. Our purpose here, however, is to set the letter in the context of all the Eusebian writings so as to draw attention to the deep contradiction between it and the body of authentic, Eusebian writings. This comparison, in our opinion, should lead to an outright rejection of the letter or to a diminution of its importance as a reliable

historical document. As a result, Eusebius's iconophobic reputation will be eliminated or greatly weakened. In addition, the theory claiming that early Christians were hostile to non-idolatrous, figurative art will be undermined.

Let us set out here the arguments of the two opposing camps:

Those in favor of authenticity:

1. K. Holl³⁷²: the style, point of view and understanding agree with those expressed in other Eusebian writings.
2. S. Gero³⁷³: similarity between certain stylistic elements in the letter and other Eusebian writings.
3. G. Florovsky and C. von Schönborn³⁷⁴: the Origenistic theological vision of the letter conforms to that presented in authentic writings of Eusebius.

Those who doubt the authenticity:

1. C. Murray³⁷⁵: the letter was unknown for 400 years; its emergence in a controversy; its insulting tone toward an empress is incompatible with Eusebius's known attitude toward Constantine and his family.
2. S. Bigham: conflict between the hostile attitude of the letter and the positive attitude expressed in authentic Eusebian writings; the contradiction between the

existing works of art around 315 and the letter's claim that such Christian monuments were nearly nonexistent.

Even after taking into account everything that has been said for and against the authenticity of the letter, including his own work, R. Grigg had this to say: "Still, I fear that the question of the authenticity of the letter has not been forthrightly dealt with. E.g., of all these endorsements, only Klauser, (n. 7 above) p. 229, ventured to date the letter. . . ³⁷⁶"

If it was written around 315, what does this letter tell us about Christian images that existed at the time of Eusebius? Not very much since the text is principally theological and not historical. The author, nonetheless, informs us that he took and kept an image that a woman was carrying in her hands. It is not clear whose effigies were on the image: 1) philosophers, 2) portraits of Paul and Christ or 3) Paul and Christ represented with the features of philosophers? The author tells us he had heard of, but had not seen, images of Simon Magus which the Simonians worshiped. St. Irenæus gives us the same information around the year 190³⁷⁷. The author himself says he saw an image of Manes, the founder of Manichæism, carried in processions.

What attitude toward images do we see in this letter? The text leaves no doubt on the subject. The author rejects the image of Christ, because, according to him, Christ's humanity, his flesh, "was mingled with the glory of His divinity so that the mortal part was swallowed up by Life" and, therefore, not representable in a painting. An image of Jesus before the Resurrection and the Ascension is impossible since it would fall under the prohibition of the Second Commandment. The letter does not speak of images of the saints; Constantia did not ask for any, but we can suppose that the author would probably have put them under the same Second Commandment ban. The author considers it quite sufficient to "paint" an ethical image of Christ by imitating his virtues.

It is interesting that the author takes a rigorist position regarding the Second

Commandment. This declaration itself ought to raise doubts about the authenticity of the letter. Taking into account the preceding texts, of authenticity, how can anyone claim that Eusebius maintains a rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment? The statue of the emperor, of Christ and the woman with a hemorrhage, the image of the Hospitality of Abraham (the devil pierced by a lance, Daniel and the lions, and the Good Shepherd that we will study later on) would all seemingly be condemned by such a rigorist interpretation. It is more likely that the letter, in part or in totality, has been “doctored,” because the contradiction with the other Eusebian texts is too flagrant. If we admit the possibility, without any proof, however, that the letter has some sections missing, what excludes the possibility that other kinds of revisions and alterations may have been carried out? Can we continue to take the letter seriously in the face of these problems, especially when we it to other Eusebian writings?

Notice the question that the author asks at the end of the letter:

Have you ever heard anything of the kind either yourself in church or from another person? Are not such things banished and excluded from churches all over the world, and is it not common knowledge that such practices are not permitted to us alone?

The authentic writings of Eusebius answer, “Yes.”³⁷⁸ Let us not forget the supposed date of the letter, between 313 and 324. We already know about Dura-Europos (256). How many other unknown Duras existed in the middle of the third century? What about the catacombs, certain sarcophagi, etc.? Even the Council of Elvira (304) is a witness for the existence of Christian murals. An invocation of a rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment does not stand up in the context of all the other Eusebian writings. This paragraph, at least, has to be rejected as inauthentic. It does not seem to us possible to use this document to establish Eusebius’s attitude toward Christian images.

4.8 Evidence from the Life of Constantine.

THE IMAGES OF NOBLE, DECEASED PAGANS: THE LIFE OF CONSTANTINE I, III³⁷⁹.

In this document, Eusebius does not mention any monuments of Christian art. He, nonetheless, clearly distinguishes between, on the one hand, pagans who want to perpetuate the memory of their noble ancestors in paintings, sculptures and inscriptions and, on the other, Christians who have preserved the memory of Righteous Ones through the writings of the prophets. Constantine is naturally associated with the second group. Without saying so explicitly, Eusebius thinks that he is imitating the Scriptures by writing about the life of a man who, he feels, is not far from the righteousness of the prophets. No painted or sculpted image, no inscription about Constantine is mentioned in this passage. Such a reference would upset the symmetry of Eusebius's comparison of the two groups:

1 pagans | Christians

2 virtuous ancestors | the Righteous of the Old Testament and Constantine

3 paintings, sculptures and inscriptions | Scripture and the Life

The denigration of visual representations and the valorization of the written word are obvious here. Even though the literary structure is elegant, can we accept this chapter as an indicator of Eusebius's attitude toward images when we take into account the painted images, the sculptures and the inscriptions about Constantine that Eusebius himself mentions? Is this simply a literary device? As for the monuments of Constantine, Eusebius is not an indifferent witness; he praises either the works themselves or "intellectual greatness" of him who ordered them. is the point: if this Eusebian text were the only one available on

the subject, we would certainly get the impression that he, and probably Constantine also, leaned toward iconophobia and aniconia. An iconophobic interpretation is often given to such statements in other ancient Christian authors. Our evaluation of Eusebius's attitude is happily balanced by other texts.

THE IMAGE OF CONSTANTINE, A CROSS AND A DRAGON: THE LIFE OF CONSTANTINE III, III³⁸⁰.

This chapter tells us that Constantine himself ordered, no doubt between 320 and 325, an enormous painting that he set up in public. We can date the order since this chapter, the third of book III, precedes the sixth chapter of the same book in which Eusebius tells about the convocation of the Council of Nicæin 325. The painting had three levels: the upper level contained a cross; below the cross, in the middle section, were full-length portraits of Constantine and his children—the cross was just above the emperor's head; on the lower part of the painting, below Constantine's and the princes' feet, there was a dragon run through by a lance, falling into the abyss of the sea. The dimensions of the image and the place of exposition, in front of the imperial palace in Constantinople, guaranteed it a wide-spread reputation. The association of the cross and the imperial family in a painting leave no ambiguity as to the message: the emperor is on the side of the Christians. He and they defeated the enemy, both political and religious. Eusebius also notes that Constantine consciously wanted “by this allegory” to illustrate a passage of the Old Testament. We have here then the principle that will become classical in the iconodule argumentation of later times: the visible shows what the written word describes, that is, the Gospel message proclaimed in word and image.

It is obvious that Eusebius admires and approves of this image. The general tone shows his positive attitude; in his own words, he says that he is “filled with wonder at the intellectual greatness” of him who conceived and ordered such “a true and faithful representation” of a biblical text. Eusebius compares the emperor's thoughts, “as if by divine,” to those of the prophets. Consequently, the written works of the prophets and the visible artistic work of Constantine are

placed more or less on the same footing. We are very far from the Letter to Constantia which the author invokes the Second Commandment against “any representation of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.” This chapter is clearly iconophile and opposes any effort to tie an iconophobic tag to Eusebius.

THE STATUES OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD AND DANIEL; THE IMAGE OF THE CROSS: THE LIFE OF CONSTANTINE III, XLIX³⁸¹.

Eusebius tells about the following images that existed in Constantinople: a statue of the Good Shepherd, that is, a symbolic and allegorical image of Christ along with another of Daniel among some lions, that is, an image of a historical person. Constantine set the statues up in a fountain in the middle of the market place. In addition, the emperor expressly ordered that an immense cross be placed in the middle of the ceiling of the imperial palace. According to Eusebius, it was Constantine’s love for God that motivated him to put the cross on the ceiling, thus, hoping that it would protect the empire.

This chapter is of particular importance, coming as it does from a supposed iconophobe, because it shows the distinction between two kinds of images: idolatrous and non-idolatrous. In the preceding chapter, III, Eusebius tells how Constantine, when he founded his new capital, Constantinople, banished idolatry of any kind: no statue that had been worshiped in the temple of a false god, no altar profaned with blood, no burnt sacrifice, no demonic festivity, no other ceremony celebrated by superstitious people were to have a place in Constantinople. Having enumerated what was not to be seen in Constantinople, Eusebius then says, “on the other hand,” here is what can be seen in the city: sculptures of the Good Shepherd and Daniel among the lions. Do we not have here the very principle of Christian iconodulia: the distinction between an idol and a Christian image, that is, an art consecrated to idolatrous worship and an art that has been purified of idolatry and used to proclaim the Gospel? In “Christ’s city,” understood as Constantinople itself or, in the figurative sense, as the Church, and historical images have their place. And the most surprising thing of

all is this: we have this information from Eusebius of Cæw, according to the Letter to Constantia, an iconophobe and an advocate of a rigorist interpretation of the Second Commandment.

These two chapters show just how dangerous it can be to interpret a denunciation of pagan worship, including the worship of statues, as a denunciation and a refusal of all kinds of figurative art. According to the advocates of the hostility theory, which claims that the ancient Christians were hostile toward all images, every expression of hostility toward pagan worship, every mockery of idolatrous images, is automatically a refusal of non-idolatrous art. It is highly ironic that it is Eusebius, unconditional iconophobe according to some, who shows us that the first denunciation does not necessarily imply the second.

THE IMAGE OF CONSTANTINE ON COINS AND ON PALACES: THE LIFE OF CONSTANTINE IV, XV³⁸².

The effigy of Constantine was struck on coins where the emperor was shown with his eyes lifted to heaven as though in prayer. The inhabitants of certain cities placed the portrait of the emperor, painted or in mosaic, on the palace doors of their cities. These images showed Constantine in a praying position, with his hands and eyes raised, but they were not necessarily Christian in content because it was a long-standing practice for the emperor to be represented in this way. Eusebius, nonetheless, thought that such images showed the piety, now Christian, of the emperor.

Eusebius gives the impression of approving the visualization of Constantine's piety in this sort of portrait.

THE SYMBOLS OF THE CHURCH IN JERUSALEM: THE LIFE OF

CONSTANTINE IV, XLV³⁸³.

This chapter is enigmatic, for it does not make clear the nature of the symbols on the church, symbols that Eusebius wanted to explain through prophetic visions. What was the decoration of the church? Was it abstract symbols, non-figurative, historical scenes, isolated representations or in groups, or composite scenes containing and persons? We cannot determine their nature on the basis of this text. On the other hand, the word symbol used to designate the Good Shepherd and Daniel in chapter III, XLIX of the Life (see above). We cannot, therefore, exclude the possibility that the symbols Eusebius commented on at the dedication of the Anastasis church in Jerusalem were figurative images.

Whatever the symbols were, Eusebius seems to have approved them; he shows no sign of protesting their existence. In fact, he seems honored at having been given the privilege of explaining them.

THE IMAGE OF CONSTANTINE IN HEAVEN: THE LIFE OF CONSTANTINE IV, XLIX³⁸⁴.

After the death of Constantine in 337, the authorities in Rome ordered images painted showing the emperor “reposing in an ethereal mansion above the celestial vault.” The content of these images is ambiguous enough to admit a pagan or a Christian interpretation. The great majority of the population in Rome in 337 was no doubt still pagan even though Christians were no doubt numerous. The pagans inaugurated the project, but Christians could easily appreciate such images since they did not contradict any Christian truth. In fact, as in the case of the statue of Christ and the woman with a hemorrhage, we have a good example of a development well known in other domains: Christians adopted an imagery that was already well rooted in pagan tradition and adapted it to their ends. In this case, the image itself could be taken over without any changes; the only thing that had to be done was to give it a Christian interpretation.

Before writing this chapter, Eusebius had already gone through the operation of changing the inner meaning. For him, Constantine was a Christian, and the image, therefore, despite the fact that the pagans had ordered it, was seen to be acceptable to Christians.

COINS REPRESENTING CONSTANTINE BEING CARRIED UP TO HEAVEN: THE LIFE OF CONSTANTINE IV, LXXIII³⁸⁵.

As in a previous case above, we have coins showing the veiled head of the emperor on one side and Constantine's going up to heaven in a chariot on the other. A hand descends toward him to welcome him to heaven. What we said previously for the image of the emperor at rest is applicable in this case also: by adopting this imagery Christians simply gave it a Christian interpretation.

Eusebius expresses no objection to this kind of image.

4.9 Analysis of the Data.

A summary of the Christian images found in Eusebius's writings:

- statues (said to be) of Christ and of the woman with a hemorrhage
- painted portraits of Christ, Peter and Paul
- a painting of the three mysterious visitors to Abraham
- a cross in the hand of Constantine's statue
- a painted portrait either of Christ and Paul or of philosophers
- a painted portrait of Constantine and his children with a cross and dragon
- a painted, full-length portrait of Constantine in a praying position
- a painted portrait of Constantine at rest in heaven
- a statue of the Good Shepherd

- a statue of Daniel and the lions
- a two-dimensional cross
- coins showing Constantine's face, his eyes lifted to heaven, and his head covered; the emperor seated on a chariot going up to heaven
- unidentified "symbols."

The categories of images in this catalogue:

STATUES

- a symbolic image of Christ: the Good Shepherd
- a portrait (said to be) of Christ
- a portrait (said to be) of the woman with a hemorrhage
- a portrait of Constantine holding a cross

- a portrait of Daniel among the lions

PAINTINGS

- portraits of Christ
- a portrait of Sts. Peter and Paul
- an image of the three mysterious visitors to Abraham
- a portrait of Christ and Paul (perhaps of philosophers)
- portraits of Constantine in various positions
- a portrait of Constantine, his children, a cross, a dragon

BAS-RELIEF

- coins showing Constantine in various positions

PAINTED MURALS OR MOSAICS?

- unidentified “symbols”

As we can see, in his own time, Eusebius provides evidence for the existence of all the categories of images that the Church will know in later times: 1) allegorical personification, 2) portraits, 3) illustrations of biblical texts, 4) historical scenes and 5) signs. Subsequent centuries will only have to develop these categories to arrive at the classical iconography as we know it today.

The fundamental question which we have tried to answer in our study is this: Was Eusebius of Cæsarea really an iconophobe; does he merit his reputation of being hostile to Christian images? After analyzing his writings that refer to images, it seems that the answer is no. He does not deserve his iconophobic reputation. In the end, what does this reputation rest on? On his authentic writings? No. It is based solely on the Letter to Constantia authenticity is problematic. Not only the letter's entry onto the historical scene 400 years after the date at which it was supposedly written, but also its use by the eighth-century iconoclasts should alert scholars to the problem of authenticity. Its content compared to the authentic Eusebian writings should also sound the alarm. It is only in the letter that the Second Commandment is invoked to condemn figurative art. How can we explain all the other references to figurative if we accept the notion that Eusebius was iconophobic? The two positions seem to exclude each other, but if we eliminate the letter by calling its authenticity into question, then there is nothing to explain. A false problem disappears.

Is it possible that Eusebius changed his mind on this question? If we envisage such a change, we must note that the Letter to Constantia, is the cause of all exegetical problems, dates from the middle of Eusebius's life, between 302 and 324, according to Wallace-Hadrill. Eusebius must have changed his mind two times, for in the writing at the beginning of his life (first edition of the History, I—VII, The Proof, well as in an expanded version of the History I—IX) and the writing from the end of his life (The Life of Constantine), shows a favorable attitude toward images. The Letter between the two extremes of his life and

requires a double change of mind. Again, it is the Letter causes a problem that requires the squaring of a circle.

The contradiction in the data, when it is recognized, causes headaches for the advocates of the hostility theory; even more painful explanations are brought forth to deal with the problem. Klauser³⁸⁶ says Eusebius did change his mind; Baynes³⁸⁷, after mentioning the statues of Daniel and the Good Shepherd, described in *The Life of Constantine*, concludes that Eusebius in no way criticizes the emperor's action, but he says that "it is not necessary to regard this silence as inconsistent with the letter to the emperor's sister." To save Eusebius's iconophobic reputation, Baynes proposes a distinction between the image of a historical scene and one of an isolated person. According to Baynes, Eusebius would have accepted the first and rejected the second. Bevan³⁸⁸ is also aware of the possible contradiction in the attitudes expressed and proposes two solutions: 1) Eusebius was carried away by his own admiration for Constantine and forgot his real iconophobic attitude when he spoke of Daniel and the Good Shepherd; 2) Eusebius condemned portraits but approved allegories, like the Good Shepherd. However, the Second Commandment, as it is invoked in the Letter, excludes both types of images.

The solution to all these exegetical problems seems simple: the Letter to Constantia, we have it, simply does not have a place in the Eusebian corpus.

We also know that Eusebius admired Origen and that with his master, Pamphilus, he wrote a *Defense of Origen*. What point did Eusebius share Origen's opinions? It is difficult to determine that, because the work has been largely lost. George Florovsky thought he saw a current of iconophobic opinion running from Origen through Eusebius to the eighth-century iconoclasts³⁸⁹. Although there is an Origenistic flavor in the letter, why must such a point of view automatically oppose figurative representations? It is true that Origenism devalued history in favor of eternal, spiritual values, supposedly discovered in the text by the use of the allegorical method, but the Origenist vision does not deny the reality of history. If the Scriptures which give us a verbal image of

historical events are accepted and honored, why must we suppose, without proof, that Origenists are against all forms of figurative art? In fact, a book is the necessary material medium from which flights of allegorical fantasy take off. A painted image plays the same role but in a different medium.

A recent book³⁹⁰ presents an esoteric and Gnostic interpretation of Christianity. By using allegory as a method of interpretation, R. Temple “discovers” his philosophy in the Bible. According to this author, Origen and the masters of the Alexandrian school were among the most honored representatives of this mystical current of thought. Despite his clear depreciation of the historical in favor of the allegorical, Temple claims to see in the Orthodox iconographic tradition another support for his mysticism. He interprets icons in his own way, as he does the Scriptures, to support his religious vision, and he applies the same allegorical method to texts and to paintings. What is surprising, however, is that an Origenist, like Temple, while devaluating the material and historical by exalting the spiritual and immaterial, does not reject icons but rather enthusiastically appropriates them to his own ends. Even though Temple places material things, icons as well as printed books, on an inferior rung of the hierarchy of beings, he sees no necessary contradiction between allegory and figurative art. There, in fact, is none. Placing matter, icons and books on the bottom of the ladder of being is not the same thing as denying them any value and use whatsoever.

4.10 Conclusion.

The conclusion is simple: the evidence provided by Eusebius on images shows us someone who has no objection to formulate in their regard. The only sour note in the corpus comes from the Letter to Constantia. It is inauthentic or if, for other reasons, it is not historically reliable, Eusebius of Cæ becomes a representative of the emerging iconophilia of the great Church. But even if we consider the letter as authentic, such as we have it now and despite the problems associated with it, we still have to deal with a confusion and contradiction in the data. Accepting the authenticity of the letter solves nothing; it only increases the problems. Eusebius cannot be at the same time an iconophobe, as the councils of Hieria and Nicæa II and Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople thought, and an iconophile, as St. John of Damascus thought. Finally, only two solutions are possible: 1) exclude the letter from the Eusebian corpus, and the witness of Eusebius becomes coherent, consistent and iconophile or 2) accept the letter, and the data becomes contradictory and confused. On the basis of the positive data we have from Eusebius on images, it seems difficult to maintain that the Father of Christian historians was an iconophobe.

We choose the simplicity and coherence of the first solution.

Notes

354. D. S. Wallace-Hadrill, *Eusebius of Cæsarea*, London, 1956.

355. Eusebius of Csarea, *The History of the Church*, G.A. Williamson, tr., Dorset Press, Harmondsworth, England, 1984, pp. 301–302.

356. John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, Crestwood, NY, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980, p. 94.

357. N. Baynes, "Idolatry and the Early Church," *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays*, London, The Athlone Press, 1955, p. 121.

358. Eusèbe de Césarée, *Histoire ecclésiastique VII, XVIII*, G. Bardy, tr., (Sources Chrétiennes 41), Paris, Les Éditions du Cerf, 1955, note 1, p. 192.

359. Eusebius of Cæsarea, *Commentary on Luke VII, 43*, PG 24, col. 542–543; the English translation is based on a French translation from Greek done by G. Derome, Laval, Quebec.

360. Sozomenus, *The Ecclesiastical History V, 21*, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series II, vol. II Grand Rapids, Mich., Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1983, pp. 342–343.

361. Eusebius of Csarea, *The Proof of the Gospel* V, 9, W. J. Ferrar, tr., London, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1920, pp. 253–254.

362. Thunberg, L., “Early Christian Interpretations of the Three Angels in Gen.18,” *Studia Patristica* VII, 1966, pp. 560–570.

363. Eusebius, *History* IX, IX, 10, pp. 370–371.

364. “I thought it my duty to release those who denied being or having been Christians, when they followed my example and invoked the gods or when they offered incense or wine before your image which I had brought in for this purpose along with the statues of the gods. . .” Letter of Pliny the Younger to Trojan.

365. Eusebius of Cæsarea, *The Life of Constantine I*, XL, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers I*, Grand Rapids, Mich. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986, p. 493.

366. See the commentary and long bibliography in Quasten, *Patrology* III, Westminster, Maryland, Christian Classics, Inc., 1990, pp. 319–324.

367. *Life I*, XI, pp. 484–485.

368. PG 20, 1545ff; “Letter of Eusebius of Cæsarea to Constantia,” Cyril Mango, ed., *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453*, Toronto, Ontario, 1986, pp. 16-18.

369. It is interesting to note that certain modern scholars doubt the authenticity of the Life of Constantine, because it is not found in the list of Eusebius's works given by St. Jerome only fifty years after Eusebius's death: H. Grégoire, "La vision de Constantin 'liquidée,'" *Byzantion* XIV (1939), note 1, pp. 34–42; W. Setton, *Revue des Etudes anciennes* XL (1938), pp. 106–107; P. Petit, « Libanius et la Vita Constantini, » *Historia* 1 (1950), p. 581. The Letter to Constantia is not found in this list either, and it appeared 400 years after the date on which it was presumably written, in a polemical context. If the Life is doubtful because it is not included in a list after only fifty years, is not the Letter even more doubtful after 400 years? Considering the supposed author, the person to whom he wrote, and the subject, how is it possible that a letter of such importance could have remained unknown for 400 years, then "discovered," and presented by those who would profit the most by its content?

370. H. A. Pohlsander, "Constantia," *Ancient Society* 24 (1993) note 29, pp. 157-158.

371. S. Gero, "The True Image of Christ: Eusebius's Letter to Constantia Reconsidered," *The Journal of Theological Studies* XXXII (1981), p. 467.

372. K. Holl, "Die Schriften des Epiphanius gegen die Bilderverehrung," *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte des Osten II*, Tübingen, 1928, p. 387.

373. Gero, "The True Image. . ."

374. G. Florovsky, "Origen, Eusebius, and the Iconoclastic Controversy," *Church History* XIX (1950); C. Von Schönborn, *L'icône du Christ*, Fribourg,

Éditions Universitaires de Fribourg, 1976, pp. 55-85.

375. C. Murray, "Art and the Early Church," *Journal of Theological Studies* 28/4 (Oct. 1977), pp. 326–336.

376. R. Grigg, "Constantine the Great and the Cult without Images," *Viator* 8 (1977), note 179, p. 31.

377. Irenæus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* I, XXIII, 4, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers I*, Grand Rapids, Mich. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979, p. 348.

378. The information that archeology furnishes us makes this question even more bizarre: "There can be no question, then, that illustrations of Christian narrative —put to emblematic use, but including the figure of Christ—were in existence by the middle of the third century. It seems equally clear that their creation expanded tremendously in the interval between that time and the conversion of Constantine." J. Breckeneridge, "Reception of Art into the Early Church," *Atti del IX Congresso Intenazionale di Archeologia Cristiana I*, The Vatican, 1978, p. 366.

379. *Life* I, III, p. 482.

380. *Ibid.* III, III, p. 520.

381. *Ibid.* III, XLIX, p. 532.

382. Ibid. IV, XV, p. 544.

383. Ibid. IV, XLV, p. 552.

384. Ibid. IV, LXIX, p. 558.

385. Ibid. IV, LXXIII, p. 559.

386. T. Klauser, "Ewägungen zur Entstehung der altchristlichen Kunst,"
Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte LXXVI (1965), pp. 5-6.

387. Baynes, p. 122.

388. E. Bevan, Holy Images, London, George Allan and Unwin Ltd., 1940.

389. Florovsky, pp. 77–96.

390. R. Temple, Icons and the Mystical Origins of Christianity, Longmead,
Shaftesbury, Dorset, England, Element Books Limited, 1990.

ANNEX: TEXTS IN TRANSLATION

THE STATUE OF CHRIST AND THE WOMAN WITH A HEMORRHAGE: THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH VII, XVIII.

18. As I have mentioned this city [Paneas], I do not think I ought to omit a story that deserves to be remembered by those who will follow us. The woman with a hemorrhage, who as we learn from the holy gospels was cured of her trouble by our Savior, was stated to have come from here. Her house was pointed out in the city, and a wonderful memorial of the benefit the Savior conferred upon her was still there. On a tall stone base at the gates of her house stood a bronze statue of a woman, resting on one knee and resembling a suppliant with arms outstretched. Facing this was another of the same material, an upright figure of a man with a double cloak neatly draped over his shoulders and his hand stretched out to the woman. Near his feet on the stone slab grew an exotic plant, which climbed up to the hem of the bronze cloak and served as a remedy for illnesses of every kind. This statue, which was said to resemble the features of Jesus, was still there in my own time, so that I saw it with my own eyes when I resided in the city. It is not at all surprising that Gentiles who long ago received such benefits from our Savior should have expressed their gratitude thus, for the features of His Apostles Paul and Peter, and indeed of Christ Himself, have been preserved in colored portraits which I have examined. How could it be otherwise, when the ancients habitually followed their own Gentile custom of honoring them as saviors in this uninhibited way?

AT PANEAS, THE STATUE OF CHRIST AND THE WOMAN WITH A HEMORRHAGE: COMMENTARY ON LURE 8:43–48.

As for me, I do not think it just to omit a story worthy of being recalled by those who will come after us. In fact, the woman with a hemorrhage was from Paneas, so people said. They point to her house in the city, and there are still admirable monuments to the Savior's good will toward her. In fact, on a raised stone, in front of the doors of her house, a bronze statue of a woman has been set up. The woman is kneeling on one knee with her hands lifted up; she looks like someone asking for a favor. In front of her is another image of the same material representing a standing man, neatly wearing a cloak and stretching his hand out to the woman. At his feet, on the stele itself, there seems to be growing a strange plant that reaches up to the fringe of the bronze cloak. It is the antidote to all kinds of illnesses. People said that this statue reproduced Jesus's features and that Maximin added to his own impiety (by destroying it). This is all that is to be said about that. Let us go on now to the following subject.

THE IMAGE OF THE THREE VISITORS TO ABRAHAM: THE PROOF OF THE GOSPEL V:9.

And again he adds to this, as if speaking of another: “For I knew that he will establish his children, and his house after him, and they will keep the ways of the Lord, to do righteousness and judgment, so that the Lord will bring on Abraham what things he spake to him.” (Gn 18:19)

The Lord Who answers, Who is recorded to have said this to Abraham, is represented as clearly confessing another Lord to be his Father and the Maker of all things. At least Abraham, who as a prophet has a clear conception of the speaker, prophetically continues with the words:

“Wilt thou destroy the righteous man with the wicked, and shall the righteous be as the wicked? If there be fifty righteous in the city, wilt thou destroy them? Wilt thou not spare [all] the place, because of the fifty righteous? Be it far from thee to fulfill this word, and destroy the righteous with the wicked, and that the righteous should be as the wicked. In no way let him that judgeth all the earth, not do judgment.” (Gn 18:23–25) I hardly think that this could have been said suitably to angels or to any of God’s ministering spirits. For it could not be regarded as a minor duty to judge all the earth. And he is no angel who is named in the previous passage, but One greater than an angel, the God and Lord who was seen beside the before-mentioned oak with the two angels in human form. Nor can it be thought that Almighty God Himself is meant. For it is impious to suggest that the Divine changes and puts on the shape and form of man. And so it remains for us to own that it is the Word of God who in the preceding passage is regarded as divine: whence the place is even today honored by those who live in the neighborhood as a sacred place in Honor of those who appeared to Abraham, and the terebinth can still be seen there. For they who were entertained by Abraham, as represented in the picture, sit one on each side, and he in the midst surpasses them in Honor. This would be our Lord and Savior, Whom though men knew Him not they worshipped, confirming the Holy Scriptures. He then, thus, in person from the time sowed the seeds of holiness

among men, putting on a human form and shape, and revealed to the godly ancestor Abraham Who He was, and showed him the mind of His Father.

THE CROSS IN THE HAND OF A STATUE OF CONSTANTINE: THE HISTORY OF THE Church IX, IX, 10.

[Constantine entered Rome in a victory parade after defeating Maxentius, his rival for power in the West]

But he, as if he possessed an innate reverence for God, was not in the least excited by their shouts or elated by their plaudits, fully aware that his help came from God: at once he ordered a trophy of the Savior's Passion to be set up under the hand of his own statue—indeed, he ordered them to place him in the most frequented spot in Rome, holding the sign of the Savior in his right hand and to engrave this inscription in Latin. I reproduce it exactly: "By this saving sign, the true proof of courage, I saved your city from the yoke of the tyrant and set her free; furthermore, I freed the Senate and People of Rome and restored them to their ancient renown and splendor."

A CROSS IN THE HAND OF A STATUE OF CONSTANTINE AND ITS INSCRIPTION: THE LIFE OF CONSTANTINE I, XL.

Moreover, by loud proclamation and monumental inscriptions he made known to all men the salutary symbol, setting up this great trophy of victory over his enemies in the midst of the imperial city, and expressly causing it to be engraven in indelible characters, that the salutary symbol was the safeguard of the Roman government and of the entire empire. Accordingly, he immediately ordered a lofty spear in the figure of a cross to be placed beneath the hand of a statue representing himself, in the most frequented part of Rome, and the following inscription to be engraved on it in the Latin language: "By virtue of this salutary sign, which is the true test of valor, I have preserved and liberated your city from the yoke of tyranny. I have also set at liberty the Roman Senate and People, and restored them to their ancient distinction and splendor."

LETTER TO CONSTANTIA

You also wrote me concerning some supposed image of Christ, which image you wished me to send you. Now what kind of thing is this that you call the image of Christ? I do not know what impelled you to request that an image of Our Savior should be delineated. What sort of image of Christ are you seeking? Is it the true and unalterable one which bears His essential characteristics, or the one which He took up for our sake when He assumed the form of a servant? Granted, He has two forms, even I do not think that your request has to do with His divine form. Surely then, you are seeking His image as a servant, that of the flesh which He put on for our sake. But that, too, we have been taught, was mingled with the glory of His divinity so that the mortal part was swallowed up by Life. Indeed, it is not surprising that after His ascent to heaven. He should have appeared as such, when, while He—the God, Logos—was yet living among men, He changed the form of the servant, and indicating in advance to a chosen band of His disciples the aspect of His Kingdom, He showed on the mount that nature which surpasses the human one—when His face shone like the sun and His garments like light. Who, then, would be able to represent by means of dead colors and inanimate delineations the glistening, flashing radiance of such dignity and glory, when even His superhuman disciples could not bear to behold Him in this guise fell on their faces, thus admitting that they could not withstand the sight? If, therefore, His incarnate form possessed such power at the time, altered as it was by the divinity dwelling within Him, what need I say of the time when He put off mortality and washed off corruption, when He changed the form of the servant into the glory of the Lord God? How can one paint an image of so wondrous and unattainable a form—if the term form is at all applicable to the divine and spiritual essence—unless, like the unbelieving pagans, one is to represent things that bear no possible resemblance to anything? For they, too, make such idols when they wish to mold the likeness of what they consider to be a god or, as they might say, one of the heroes or anything else of the kind, yet are unable even to approach a resemblance, and so delineate and represent some strange human shapes. Surely, even you will agree that such practices are not lawful for us. But if you mean to ask of me the image, not of His form transformed into that of God, but that of the mortal flesh before its transformation, can it be that you have forgotten that passage in which God lays down the law that no likeness should be made either of what is in heaven or what

is in the earth beneath? Have you ever heard anything of the kind either yourself in church or from another person? Are not such things banished and excluded from churches all over the world, and is it not common knowledge that such practices are not permitted to us alone?

Once—I do not know how—a woman brought me in her hands a picture of two men in the guise of philosophers and let fall the statement that they were Paul and the Savior—I have no means of saying where she had had this from or learned such a thing. With the view that neither she nor others might be given offense, I took it away from her and kept it in my house, as I thought it improper that such things ever be exhibited to others, lest we appear, like idol worshippers, to carry our god around in an image. I note that Paul instructs all of us not to cling anymore to things of the flesh; for, he says, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more. It is said that Simon the sorcerer is worshipped by godless heretics painted in lifeless material. I have also seen myself the man who bears name of madness [Mani, the founder of Manichæism] painted on an image and escorted by Manatees. To us, however, such things are forbidden. For in confessing the Lord God, Our Savior, we make ready to see Him as God, and we ourselves cleanse our hearts that we may see Him after we have been cleansed.

THE IMAGES OF NOBLE, DECEASED PAGANS: THE LIFE OF CONSTANTINE I, III.

Mankind, devising some consolation for the frail and precarious duration of human life, has thought by the erection of monuments to glorify the memories of their ancestors with immortal honors. Some have employed the vivid delineations and colors of paintings; some have carved statues from lifeless blocks of wood; while others, by engraving their inscriptions deep on tablets and monuments, have thought to transmit the virtues of those whom they honored to perpetual remembrance. All these, indeed, are perishable, and consumed by the lapse of time, being representations of the corruptible body, and not expressing the image of the immortal soul. And yet, these seemed sufficient to those who had no well-grounded hope of happiness after the termination of this mortal life. But God, that God, I say, who is the common Savior of all, having treasured up with himself, for those who love godliness, greater blessings than human thought has conceived, gives the earnest and first-fruits of future rewards even here, assuring in some sort immortal hopes to mortal eyes. The ancient oracles of the prophets, delivered to us in the Scripture, declare this; the lives of pious men, who shone in old times with every virtue, bear witness to posterity of the same; and our own days prove it to be true, wherein Constantine, who alone of all that ever wielded the Roman power was the friend of God the Sovereign of all, has appeared to all mankind so clear an example of a godly life.

THE IMAGE OF CONSTANTINE, A CROSS AND A DRAGON: THE LIFE OF CONSTANTINE III, III.

And besides this, he [Constantine] caused to be painted on a lofty tablet, and set up in the front of the portico of his palace, so as to be visible to all, a representation of the salutary sign placed above his head, and below it that hateful and savage adversary mankind, who by means of the tyranny of the ungodly had wasted the Church of God, falling headlong, under the form of a dragon, to the abyss of destruction. For the sacred oracles in the books of God's prophets have described him as a dragon and a crooked serpent; and for this reason, the emperor thus publicly displayed a painted resemblance of the dragon beneath his own and his children's feet, stricken through with a dart, and cast headlong into the depths of the sea. In this manner, he intended to represent the secret adversary of the human race, and to indicate that he was consigned to the gulf of perdition by virtue of the salutary trophy placed above his head. This allegory, then, was thus conveyed by means of the colors of a picture: and I am filled with wonder at the intellectual greatness of the emperor, who as if by divine inspiration thus expressed what the prophets had foretold concerning this monster, saying that "God would bring his great and strong and terrible sword against the dragon, the flying serpent; and would destroy the dragon that was in the sea." (Is 27:1) This it was of which the emperor gave a true and faithful representation in the picture above described.

THE STATUES OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD AND DANIEL; THE IMAGE OF THE CROSS: THE LIFE OF CONSTANTINE III, XLIX.

On the other hand, one might see the fountains in the midst of the market place graced with figures representing the good Shepherd, well known to those who study the sacred oracles, and that of Daniel also with the lions, forged in brass, and resplendent with plates of gold. Indeed, so large a measure of Divine love possessed the emperor's soul, that in the principal apartment of the imperial palace itself, on a vast tablet displayed in the center of its gold-covered paneled ceiling, he caused the symbol of our Savior's Passion to be fixed, composed of a variety of precious stones richly in-wrought with gold. This symbol he seemed to have intended to be as it were the safeguard of the empire itself.

THE IMAGE OF CONSTANTINE ON COINS AND ON PALACES: THE LIFE OF CONSTANTINE IV, XV.

How deeply his soul was impressed by the of divine faith may be understood from the circumstance that he directed his likeness to be stamped on the golden coin of the empire with the eyes uplifted as in the posture of prayer to God: and this money became current throughout the Roman world. His portrait also at full length was placed over the entrance gates of the palaces in some cities, the eyes upraised to heaven, and the hands outspread as if in prayer.

THE SYMBOLS OF THE CHURCH IN JERUSALEM: THE LIFE OF CONSTANTINE IV, XLV.

I myself too, unworthy as I was of such a privilege, pronounced various public orations in honor of this solemnity, wherein I partly explained by a written description the details of the imperial edifice, and partly endeavored to gather from the prophetic visions apt illustrations of the symbols it displayed. Thus, joyfully was the festival of dedication celebrated in the thirtieth year of our emperor's reign.

THE IMAGE OF CONSTANTINE IN HEAVEN: THE LIFE OF CONSTANTINE IV, XLIX.

Nor was their [the Romans, Senate and people] sorrow expressed only in words: they also proceeded to honor him, by the dedication of paintings to his memory, with the same respect as before his death. The design of these pictures embodied a representation of heaven itself, and depicted the emperor reposing in an ethereal mansion above the celestial vault.

**COINS REPRESENTING CONSTANTINE BEING CARRIED UP TO
HEAVEN: THE LIFE OF CONSTANTINE IV, LXXIII.**

A coinage was also struck which bore the following device. On one side appeared the figure of our blessed prince, with the head closely veiled: the reverse exhibited him sitting as a charioteer, drawn by four horses, with a hand stretched downward from above to receive him up to heaven.

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